

## Big Local: Beyond the Early Years

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*Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

McCabe, A, Wison, M & Macmillan, R 2017, *Big Local: Beyond the Early Years: Our Bigger Story: the longitudinal multi-media evaluation of Big Local: 2015-2016*. TSRC, The University of Birmingham.  
<<http://ourbiggerstory.com/reports.php>>

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# **Big Local: Beyond the Early Years**

**Our Bigger Story: The Longitudinal Multi Media Evaluation  
of Big Local**

**2015 – 2016**

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With: Paul Morgans and Matt Edwards

**July 2017**

## Acknowledgements

Our thanks to:

- All those who gave their time generously in the 15 Our Bigger Story Big Local areas for interviews, informal discussions, filming and other activities in Barrowcliff, Birchfield, Blackpool Revoe, Bountagu, Catton Grove, Grassland Hasmoor, Growing Together, Hanwell, Lawrence Weston, North Northfleet, Radstock, Ramsey Million, Three Parishes, Whitley Bay, and Westfield
- Local Trust, the Big Local evaluation advisory group and Local Trust partners for their continuing advice, guidance and support.
- Helen Harris for patient evaluation administration.

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## Section 1

### Introduction

#### Overview

This section provides:

- An introduction to the report
- Thumbnail portraits of each of the 15 Big Local areas participating in the evaluation

#### Summary

This report, commissioned by Local Trust, summarises the learning from 15 urban, rural and seaside Big Local areas involved in the longitudinal, multi-media evaluation of Big Local, “Our Bigger Story”, over the period 2015 and 2016.

This section provides an introduction to the 15 areas that participated as case study sites in 2015 and 2016. Following sections of the report examine progress against outcomes (Section 2), how Big Local operates in the 15 areas involved in Our Bigger Story (Section 3), thematic learning (Section 4) and the challenges facing Big Local partnerships in delivering their plans (Section 5). The final section then summarises key learning to date and highlights emerging issues for the future of Big Local.

### 1.1 About this report

Local Trust commissioned a longitudinal multi-media evaluation of Big Local in early 2015. The evaluation, “Our Bigger Story”, is planned to run from 2015 through to 2025.

This report maps progress in the evaluation sample of 15 Big Local areas from 2015 to 2016. It explores the approach, delivery, outcomes, impact and influence of Big Local across the 15 areas, and the principles that underpin Big Local as a resident-led, asset based approach to place based development.

### 1.2 Report structure

This section, **Section 1**, provides an introduction to the 15 areas that participated as case study sites in 2015 and 2016. **Section 2** explores what is working and overall progress against the Big Local outcomes across the 15 evaluation areas. **Section 3** outlines how Big Local works, the Big Local approach and principles. **Section 4** reflects on the key themes that emerged from the first year of evaluation activity across Our Bigger Story areas (issues, for example of leadership, influence, expectations and legacy). **Section 5** provides analysis of the strengths of, and challenges facing, an ambitious programme based on the principles of resident led changes. **Section 6** then summarises key learning to date – and identifies emerging issues for future consideration.

Where direct quotations from interviews have been used in the report, these are used to illustrate a view wider than that of any one individual or Big Local area. All quotes are attributed to the role of

the speaker i.e. partnership member, resident (where not a partnership member), paid worker, delivery partner, Locally Trusted Organisation (LTO), Big Local rep and Local Trust.

A detailed account of evaluation methods and processes is provided in Appendix 1.

## 1.3 Thumbnail sketches of the 15 areas

### **Barrowcliff Big Local**

Barrowcliff is a social housing estate of 2,900 people, sitting high on a hill overlooking Scarborough, a seaside town. The Steering Group that oversees Barrowcliff Big Local has five wishes: a cleaner environment; better community facilities; good education and jobs; improving health and lifestyle; community safety (including community pride and neighbourliness).

Scarborough Jobmatch (part of Groundwork North Yorkshire) is the Locally Trusted Organisation (LTO) for Barrowcliff Big Local acting as the accountable body for the funding, drawing it down from Local Trust and distributing it to groups as needed. To date, Local Trust has 'paid' £500,915 to Barrowcliff Big Local

### **Examples of activities**

Barrowcliff's flagship project was the creation of a play park in the centre of the housing estate, along with traffic calming measures near the park and the school. It has supported a number of activities, through commissions to organisations and through grants to local groups, around giving people the confidence and skills which in turn help their employment prospects. These include courses to help people get the CSCS cards they need to work on construction sites, a job match project and its 'Biggest Loser' project (a weight loss course). It is working with the local school to provide different approaches to educating local children.

### **Making a difference**

The park has helped local residents realise that change can happen and it has helped to improve the image of the estate. Barrowcliff Big Local is providing opportunities that local people might not otherwise access e.g. its support for accessible cycling and the locally run and locally appropriate weight loss programme. There is evidence of people finding employment through their involvement in Big Local.

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### **Birchfield Big Local**

Birchfield is situated on the northern edge of Birmingham's inner city. The Big Local area covers an area with a population of 7,200 people. Housing tenure is mixed with a high proportion of Housing Association properties and houses in multiple occupation. It is a diverse community in which 54% of the population is of Asian origin and 45% of local residents are under 25 years old.

Birchfield's Big Local plan, which was endorsed in February 2014, and Plan Review (2015) identify four themes focused on physical improvements, cultural heritage, improving local services and levels of participation, as well as developing the local economy. The Locally Trusted Organisation (LTO) is Birmingham Voluntary Service Council. To date, Local Trust has 'paid' £392,639 to Birchfield Big Local.

### **Examples of activities**

Much of the Big Local's work is being delivered through the commissioning of local social enterprises and by volunteers. For example, ATHAC CIC are supporting families with disabled children and BRAG

(Birchfield Residents Action Group), a local voluntary organisation, are leading on Birchfield in Bloom, and the Livingston Road allotment project works with vulnerable adults. Volunteers have been recruited to help run Stepping Forward (which combines a job club with help with conversational English and basic IT), a Women's Group (encouraging local women to share skills and knowledge) and the development of a Birchfield Heritage Trail. In partnership with UnLtd, Birchfield has supported local residents in exploring setting up social enterprises, and 6 ventures have so far achieved a Star People Award.

Birchfield Big Local recently completed a Community Asset Survey to identify potential buildings or land that could be developed as a community centre, and is considering becoming incorporated as a way of managing that asset.

### **Making a Difference**

To date Birchfield Big Local have recruited over 30 regular volunteers who have been supporting local residents with benefits advice and access to employment support. Working with the City Council and Midland Heart Housing substantial environmental improvements have been made to the area. This has included not only winning Britain in Bloom awards but also addressing issues of street litter and fly tipping. Support for the Women's Group and ATHAC CIC has played a considerable role in overcoming social isolation amongst vulnerable groups in the community whilst the Heritage Trail has increased pride in the area.

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### **Blackpool Revoe Big Local**

Revoe is situated about half a mile from Blackpool sea front. Revue Big Local covers an area of 3,000 people and is a mix of long established residents alongside highly transient communities. Revue is amongst the 10 most deprived neighbourhoods in England and, whilst predominantly white, has growing Muslim and Eastern European groups.

The LTO is Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde Council for Voluntary Service. To date, Local Trust has 'paid' £39,043 to Blackpool Revue Big Local.

### **Examples of activities**

Revue's Big Local plan was approved in January 2016 and the areas of work focus on environmental improvements, community safety, local business development and opportunities. Revue has adopted an open tendering process for the services it wishes to commission, in which tender proposals have to state clearly how the organisation intends to bring added value to Revue Big Local. There is also a strong emphasis on health and wellbeing – in particular in addressing drug and alcohol use locally. Examples of activities include working with local shopkeepers to improve the frontages on the main Central Drive, a range of community safety measures (including CCTV and improving shop front security), Hepatitis C local drop-in sessions and drug support and counselling services.

### **Making a difference**

It is early days for Revue Big Local. Contracts for service delivery have only recently been awarded with work commencing in the late summer of 2016. What is evident is the commitment of the partnership to take on the difficult issues of drugs and alcohol locally, especially as there has been agreement across the community as to the importance of tackling drugs and alcohol use – but no agreement on how best to do so. The aim is to develop the hub at Ibbison Court into a thriving community Resource Centre. Two key developments in the immediate future will be the commissioning of outreach youth work and the appointment of a Community Work Apprentice to enhance and broaden community engagement.

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### **Bountagu Big Local**

Bountagu Big local is in Lower Edmonton, North London. The name Bountagu comes from the two key roads in the area (Bounces Road and Montagu Road) and the community hub sits almost on the corner of the two. The Bountagu area covers about 1,500 households and 5,200 residents. There are three social housing estates within Bountagu – both owner occupied and privately rented – as well as private housing. Often these houses have been split into flats.

The Bountagu mission is *To Build the Community Together*. The partnership believes in generating a cooperative culture where people can give or exchange skills and services, building the capacity of the community to help itself, rather than commissioning others to deliver services. Its core focus is to build a Bountagu community, alongside priorities of children and young people, people 50 plus, enterprise and employment, environment and facilities. Sustainability and legacy is also something the partnership intends to plan for over the next couple of years.

The LTO is Enfield Children and Young Persons Services (ECYPS), a voluntary sector support organisation which is based in the local area. To date, Local Trust has ‘paid’ £201,025 to Bountagu Big Local

### **Examples of activities**

Bountagu is taking a community development approach in delivering the plan with a small number of part-time staff to engage and develop local residents and volunteers.

Bountagu's community hub is a major resource for hosting activities and has a diverse group of people making use of the space. These include coffee mornings, young people's groups, ESOL classes, a job club and social enterprise support. In addition, there is a clean up project, an ‘Over 50s Buddying Service’, an annual community festival, and outreach work through door knocking in the local community and work with schools.

### **Making a difference**

Residents talk about people feeling more relaxed and positive about where they live; there are examples of increased neighbourliness and people from different communities integrating with each other; many people have been helped into work through training, employment and enterprise advice provided by Bountagu Big Local.

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### **Catton Grove Big Local**

Catton Grove is an area of approximately 6,200 people situated one mile north of Norwich City Centre. The Big Local area falls within two electoral wards, both of which are classed as areas of high deprivation. The main Catton Grove estate was built in the 1930s and there are many longstanding families living there, though the Big Local area also includes private housing, some of which is buy to let. In recent years there has been an increasing Eastern European population.

The Big Local partnership has largely retained the priorities agreed following consultation at the start: building an active and vibrant community; access to employment and training; building a healthy community; activities and services for young people and activities and services for older people.

The LTO for Catton Grove Big Local is Voluntary Norfolk. Local Trust has ‘paid’ £165,929 to Catton Grove Big Local.

### **Examples of activities**

Catton Grove has focused on gaining management control of a local unused police building and opened it as a community hub ('The Box') in 2016. The aim is to meet local needs in a local space. An organisation is commissioned to run advice, support and training sessions (e.g. a jobs club and digital skills) from there. There has been high demand for the services provided at The Box (including from residents from Eastern Europe, who have been previously difficult to engage with Big Local).

The partnership has taken a bottom up approach to delivering some of its priorities for example, community newsletters and a community allotment. In addition, children and young people's activities are supported through centre based and outdoor youth work.

### **Making a difference**

The advice sessions at the community hub, The Box, are supporting people with complex welfare rights and health issues. Members of the partnership say the most valuable thing has been making new friends and building relationships with people they wouldn't have otherwise met.

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### **Grassland Hasmoor Big local**

This Big Local area covers the two villages of Grassmoor in North East Derbyshire and Hasland in Chesterfield. These are two separate communities - Hasland has a population of 9,700 people and Grassmoor 3,850 - and the aim is to create closer links between the two through stimulating more local activity. Grassmoor, in particular, is an ex mining area where lots of social activities were on tap, and the challenge now is to encourage and support people to get on and make things happen themselves. The LTO is Links: the Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire Council for Voluntary Service and Action. To date, Local Trust has 'paid' £216,513 to Grassland Hasmoor Big Local.

Grassland Hasmoor Big Local (GHBL) has a base in both communities and has put up video screens in several well used venues to promote Big Local and what they are doing.

Key areas of work include:

- People: Children & Young People; Working Age Families; Senior Citizens
- Place: Green & Open Spaces; Living Environment; Community Facilities
- Communication and Engagement

GHBL hopes/aims for match funding or its equivalent to be found for its larger projects in order to maximise its Big Local resources. Each activity area has a working group comprising volunteers.

### **Examples of activities**

A lot of social initiatives are organised to try and bring people together through affordable activities and create more community spirit. These have included a children's summer programme, a community cinema, intergenerational gardening activities, 'Men in Sheds', galas and local socials and trips. In the last year, a focus on poverty has led to welfare rights sessions, a holiday hunger project, and a monthly affordable meal for local families. In addition, residents are involved in environmental projects. There are plans to improve and maximise use of key buildings and facilities in each of the two villages, plus the development of a skate park.

### **Making a difference**

The Green and Open Spaces working group has been successful in working with its local authorities and other agencies to open up pathways in the area, connecting the two areas and making them accessible to everyone. In 2016, school holiday activities were provided, primarily by volunteers, for four days over five weeks, including free lunches and snacks. The 'Pit Stop Diner' is proving very popular.

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### **Growing Together Big Local**

This Big Local has 11,700 residents and covers the Blackthorn, Cherry Lodge, Goldings, Lings, Lumbertubs and Overstone Lodge estates in East Northampton, all built as part of the New Towns developments in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Growing Together has a vision to ensure that the estates are *'great places in which to live and to grow up, where residents care for each other, the community and their environment'*. Its current priorities include investment in children and young people; improving the quality of life for older and disabled residents; creating a vibrant and exciting community for everyone; enhancing and protecting the local environment and bringing together the diverse and changing community, including new communities.

The LTO is a local community organisation, Blackthorne Good Neighbours. To date, Local Trust has 'paid' £801,811 to Growing Together Big Local.

### **Examples of activities**

Growing Together has used more of its million than any of the other case study areas. It has been used to support three new play areas, two youth shelters with exercise equipment, a "trim trail" of outdoor exercise equipment, youth clubs outdoor activity youth programmes, film based youth programmes, wildlife information boards, the start-up costs for a new community nursery, clubs for older residents and for an inter-club Kurling league and a programme of trips. The Big Local partnership has also supported environmental and performance zones at a local school, establishing a community hub serving two of the estates and leading a major partnership project to make a brook that flows through two of the estates (and three lakes along its course) sustainable in the face of serious environmental pressures. It has also run a popular small grants fund and led the development of Neighbourhood Plan for the area approved in a local referendum on 23 February 2017 (other than staff time, the Neighbourhood Plan work was funded from outside the £1m Big Local allocation).

### **Making a difference**

Growing Together estimates that by March 2016 it had funded 35 physical and community enhancements, 1600 hours of community activity, and supported 328 community groups and organisations. At least 38% of young people in the area (and probably a majority) had had at least one Growing Together funded experience, and evidence suggested that the older people's clubs had transformed the quality of life for some very isolated people.

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### **Hanwell Big Local**

Hanwell Big Local originally consisted of three peripheral estates in the London Borough of Ealing with a diverse population of some 7,800. Over 2016 the Big Local area was expanded to cover a fourth estate, bringing the total population closer to 10,000 people.

Hanwell Big Local partnership consists of eleven local residents of which three are agency representatives including the LTO, supported by a Project Co-ordinator.

The LTO is EASE, a long established community development charity. To date, Local Trust has 'paid' £111,428 to Hanwell Big Local.

### **Examples of activities**

Hanwell Big Local's plan was approved in November 2014 and has four core themes: accessibility (mobility and affordable service); health and leisure; the environment and employability; and enterprise. Initial activity, to promote the profile of Hanwell Big Local, focused on the disbursement

of 14 small grants. Subsequent projects supported by the partnership include: an affordable door-to-door bus service for those who find it difficult to get about in the local area; youth activities; a horticultural/gardening apprenticeship scheme; support for residents to improve neglected communal gardens; and local businesses development. These have largely been delivered through a commissioning process involving local agencies identified in the original plan – e.g. Ealing Community Transport, Cultivate London & Piece of Green and EASE Youth Services: each with ambitious targets for matched funding. The partnership has also worked with local traders to improve the local retail offer and jointly sponsored the first Christmas event at the local shops to switch on the lights, the first in the area for over a decade.

### **Making a difference**

The Horticultural Apprenticeship Scheme will be fully operational in 2017, offering two, two year, apprenticeships to local people. Ealing Council has also agreed to hand over an unused piece of land—Cheyne Path—and have provided match funding for them to develop a conservation area with residents. Other major developments in the area are Crossrail and two major regeneration projects of Local Authority housing stock – developments which the partnership is trying to influence. The major current issue is the planned management transfer of Hanwell Community Centre from local authority control. Hanwell Big Local has supported the development of a local consortium to bid for management of this substantial asset and a decision on this tender is due in 2017.

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### **Lawrence Weston Big Local**

Lawrence Weston is a peripheral estate to the west of Bristol and at the edge of Avonmouth docks with 7,100 people. The estate has a largely long established white community though with a small, but growing, population from Eastern Europe. Lawrence Weston Big Local emerged from a comprehensive community plan developed by the LTO (Ambition Lawrence Weston: ALW) in 2013, which has subsequently become the basis for Lawrence Weston becoming a designated neighbourhood Development Plan area. To date, Local Trust has ‘paid’ £143,616 and Lawrence Weston Big Local has attracted over £700k other monies, in addition to £1.2 million Coastal Community Fund for the ward area.

### **Example of activities**

To date, Lawrence Weston has undertaken a diverse range of activities. These have included taking over the recently closed youth centre as a base for the employment hub. The partnership has also supported environmental improvements to green spaces, the installation of new play areas, the development of a community shop selling locally produced arts and crafts materials and a community café in the local Baptist Church (Café on the Cross). In addition, Big Local has focused on energy efficiency measures to the housing stock in the area and the promotion of green energy initiatives in partnership with Bristol Community Energy. The partnership has also used Big Local monies strategically to lever in substantial additional funding through the Coastal Communities Fund: a partnership initiative with two local authorities: Bristol and South Gloucester.

### **Making a difference**

With ALW, the Big Local has plans to transform the community. These include attracting investment from a supermarket chain for a new shopping outlet, working to develop currently derelict land into both housing for sale and community owned homes. Another site will also accommodate an integrated community centre, housing Big Local, local voluntary groups, health and wellbeing services and the local library. The partnership has also invested in substantial green energy initiative, such as a solar farm and wind turbines on brown field sites around the M5 corridor between the

estate and Avonmouth which will bring in a sustainable return of an estimated £25,000 per year, with an upfront payment of £150k, for community benefit.

### **Northfleet Big Local**

Northfleet is located just south of Gravesend in North Kent and the Big Local covers four estates in the town with a population of 2,400 people. Historically these were predominantly white communities though they have become increasingly diverse and now includes migrants from Eastern Europe as well as African, Caribbean and South East Asian groups. The Big Local plan was submitted in August 2013 and identified free community spaces, access to employment, children and young people and environmental improvements as key priorities. The LTO is the Council for Voluntary Service North West Kent. To date, Local Trust has 'paid' £320,344 to Northfleet Big Local.

### **Examples of activities**

Northfleet Big Local has supported a diverse range of projects and works closely with UnLtd to promote local social enterprise. Initiatives include CAS Training, providing support in access to employment and other advice services, Hive Hope foodbank and the No Walls Garden which works with the long term unemployed and ex-offenders. The partnership has also supported the development of local amenities including a secure children's play area and working with our local trusted organisation to reopen and utilise Wallis Park Community Centre. Much of the partnerships work in the past two years has focused on building community cohesion across the four estates in the area. Working towards this goal has included work on heritage promotion to increase pride in the community and organising regular cross-community events such as a farmers' market.

### **Making a difference**

Examples of Northfleet Big Local making a difference include CAS Training working with over 300 people in its first 18 months and supporting over 70 local residents into employment. Previously derelict land has been turned into a play area and No Walls Garden has improved the physical environment around the centre of Northfleet, whilst supporting local residents into, for example, self-employment as landscape gardeners. Many of the substantial challenges for the partnership lie ahead. The development of Ebbsfleet Garden City and the potential Paramount Theme Park around the edges of Northfleet present opportunities for increasing residents' access to local employment – issues which Northfleet Big Local are already in negotiations about with the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation.

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### **Radstock and Westfield Big Local<sup>1</sup>**

Situated in North Somerset, Big Local covers two wards, Radstock and Westfield which include the out-lying villages of Clandown, Haydon, Writhlington and Tynning. The area, now defined as primarily rural, was formally part of the North Somerset coalfield. The total population is 11,500 though with recent housing developments particularly in Radstock, that population is expanding. The LTO is Westfield Parish Council. To date, Local Trust has 'paid' £139,168 to Radstock and Westfield Big Local.

### **Examples of activities**

The Radstock Big Local plan was approved in February 2015. This has five core themes, people, place, mobility, business development and lifelong learning. Over the first two years of operation, Big Local has focused on small grants. These are awarded through high profile Dragon's Den style community events. To date there have been four Dragon's Dens awarding over 40 grants of up to £500. These have supported a diverse range of local projects – from Swallow's (working with adults with a

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<sup>1</sup> To avoid confusion with Westfield Big Local (Sheffield), Radstock and Westfield is referred to as Radstock throughout the rest of this report

learning disability), though to local drama groups and physical improvements to community facilities – such as the local history museum (to develop its tourist offer) and the Victoria Hall Arts Centre. Big Local is in the process of developing the Big Fund which will award larger grants for events and building improvements.

### **Making a difference**

Radstock Big Local has two part-time development workers. Much of their work has been to develop the capacity of local groups not only to bid for funding but also look at longer term sustainability. Two examples of positive outcomes are supporting Westfield Allotment Group (WAGs) to develop growing spaces specifically for children and young people and supporting Swallow's to develop a social enterprise with people with a learning disability. There are also longer term plans to develop the local economy through town centre improvements and the development of an integrated community hub and health and wellbeing centre.

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### **Ramsey Million Big Local**

Ramsey Million covers the small market town of Ramsey and five nearby villages in Cambridgeshire. This is a rural area, with a population of 8,400, in the fenland countryside approximately 15 miles from Peterborough and Huntingdon. Ramsey Parish is a recognised area of deprivation with poor transport links, limited employment opportunities and low aspirations – particularly amongst young people. Ramsey is on the cusp of changing from a market town to a dormitory town where some people work, shop and entertain themselves elsewhere only returning home at night.

Ramsey Million aims to involve young people in indoor and outdoor social spaces; enable families and children to access affordable activities and events; improve community transport links; provide training and employment opportunities; make the most of the town's heritage and ensure opportunities for people to support one another.

Its main LTO is a small community organisation, Ramsey Neighbourhood Trust. To date, Local Trust has 'paid' £315,986 to Ramsey Million Big Local.

### **Examples of activities**

Ramsey million has created and supported regular children's activities across a wide age range – from 0-18 years. It is also supporting the forthcoming skatepark, which has been on the cards for at least ten years.

A lot of work has been committed to local heritage projects, both to build community pride in Ramsey and to attract outsiders who spend their money in local shops and cafes. This has involved helping local heritage groups to work together more effectively and contracting a dedicated worker to open up new visitor opportunities. This has led to a Ramsey brand and new website [www.discoverramsey.co.uk](http://www.discoverramsey.co.uk) to attract visitors from further afield.

### **Making a difference**

Ramsey Million has facilitated communication between organisations in the area and become a 'go to' organisation for the council with whom it now has some influence, as well as for local community groups. The youth activities are run with young people as volunteers, apprentices and as paid workers, and are very different in nature from the youth work delivered in Ramsey in the past. The town is reported to be busier and more vibrant and there appears to be a reduction in anti-social behaviour.

Ramsey Neighbourhood Trust was a small organisation run by volunteers but has, as a result of Ramsey Million, created ten jobs for local people and built its capacity as a potential legacy body to continue the Big local ethos.

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### **Three Parishes Big Local**

The Three Parishes Big Local is located in North Shropshire on the edge of the Welsh border. Originally a coal mining area, the Three Parishes has a population of 8,000 in the villages of St. Martin's, Weston Rhyn and the larger town of Gabowen. Each community lies about two miles apart and the area is dissected by a major commuter route – the A5.

The LTO is Oswestry Community Action, a locally based charity which aims to foster residents' skills and aspirations to respond to community needs. To date, Local Trust has 'paid' £210,702 to Three Parishes Big Local.

### **Examples of activities**

The original Three Parishes Big Local plan was published in September 2014 and refreshed in early 2016. Amongst its key aims are environmental improvements, enhancing community buildings, developing local enterprise and improving skills, qualifications, health and wellbeing locally. Two key issues identified were access to affordable credit and, in deep rural communities, transport. Much of the early work of the Three Parishes Big Local focused on small grants, with developmental support for local community groups to access funds and build their capacity to attract external monies. Examples include supporting a now well attended local drop-in coffee morning and enabling young people to participate in activities beyond the immediate community. Big Local also funds summer schemes and out of school activities. Building on this experience the Big Local partnership has moved on to making larger grants, for example enabling Community First Responders (volunteer rural ambulance service) to purchase and equip a new ambulance, and supporting a consortium of local groups to develop the local library (under threat of closure) into a community resource.

### **Making a difference**

Over 2015-16, working with FAIRshare, the Three Parishes Big Local piloted a rural Credit Union in the three local settlements. This has become the partnership's largest single investment in an effort to address financial inclusion. Though initially slow to start, this initiative has been re-shaped in discussions between the partnership and FAIRshare to include, as well as three local credit union collection points, outreach promoting financial literacy, developing more on-line access to credit union savings and loans, and a successful savings club in the local school.

.....

### **Westfield Big Local**

Westfield is a 'township' with a population of 3,400 on the south east edge of Sheffield, on the border with Rotherham and overlooking Derbyshire. The estate was built in the 1970s to house the increasing population of Sheffield.

Westfield Big Local feel that the area has been neglected and that the community spirit evident when the estate was built has disappeared. It has few community facilities and is focusing on seven priority action areas: community; crime and antisocial behaviour; spaces for socialising; health and wellbeing; environment and green space; education and employment; and activities for all the community, young and old.

Westfield Big Local works in partnership with the University of Sheffield who have helped to map a range of assets in the area and held an International Planning Conference at the local school. The LTO is Beighton Village Development Trust. To date, Local Trust has 'paid' £96,599 to Westfield Big Local.



### **Examples of activities**

Westfield has concentrated on reinvigorating community spirit through its annual gala and social trips, and on arranging a management transfer of the previously council managed community centre. It is now creating a community café and offering a range of community activities through which people can socialise, such as a craft group and a gardening group. Big local runs holiday activities for children and is looking at the potential for more play / park space on the estate.

### **Making a difference**

The community centre is the only community space on the estate and is providing a facility for all ages. It has become a drop-in point for people who were previously isolated, and younger and older people are working together. There is a sense that more people are talking to each other, there is greater community engagement and there is a more community spirit.

.....

### **Whitley Bay Big Local**

Whitley Bay is a seaside town in North Tyneside. The Big Local area has 3,200 residents. Having gone through a period of declining fortunes and rising unemployment, there is now a regeneration strategy which includes a rejuvenated seafront and enthusiasm to re-invigorate the town. It wants to see relationships between people and organisations in the town grow and deepen and an increasing sense of community emerge. The Whitley Bay Big Local (WBBL) themes centre on engagement and coordination; environment; people; wellbeing; partnerships and communication.

The WBBL Plan 2016-2019 exhorts residents to look after each other, look after themselves, and look after Whitley Bay. Its LTO is New Prospects, a charity which provides support to people with learning disabilities. To date, Local Trust has 'paid' £220,925 to WBBL.

### **Examples of activities**

WBBL has taken both a grassroots and a strategic approach. It has opened up engagement and volunteering opportunities to individuals at its community shop and through its Small Sparks grants to individuals and small community groups, which have led to over forty projects. There are lots of small scale activities, as well as contributions to Whitley Bay as a whole. For example through improving the town's appearance with plants and flowers; clean ups; the Big Local appointment of a town caretaker and support to the revival of the town's annual Carnival. Big Local has taken a more strategic approach through the establishment of a credit union in the town. It has also supported local youth organisations created a regular newsletter and webpage, worked with UnLtd and developed its own masterplan for Whitley Bay. The partnership has also been active in the opening up of communication between Big Local and key agencies about this masterplan, particularly the local Council, police, Chamber of Trade and local transport agencies. It has also levered in over £100,000 of match funding.

### **Making a difference**

WBBL is a formal consultee on North Tyneside Council planning issues and has helped give people a voice in strategic planning for the town, e.g. around the seafront regeneration and economic development, and changed the relationship between the community and the council for the better. It has brought people together and linked residents into initiatives they were previously unaware of. It sees itself as a catalyst for turning round the perceptions of Whitley Bay and its fortunes in the future. WBBL has recently decided to create its own charity structure and has become a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO).



## Section 2

### What's working - progress towards the Big Local outcomes

#### Overview

This section explores areas progress against the four Big Local outcomes of:

- Communities being better able to identify local needs and take action in response to them.
- People having increased skills and confidence, so that they continue to identify and respond to needs in the future.
- The community is making a difference to the needs it prioritises.
- People feel that their area is an even better place to live

#### Summary

Big Local areas were set the following broad outcomes at the start of the programme:

- Communities being better able to identify local needs and take action in response to them.
- People having increased skills and confidence, so that they continue to identify and respond to needs in the future.
- The community is making a difference to the needs it prioritises.
- People feel that their area is an even better place to live.

In reality, partnerships struggle to express these as four separate and discreet outcomes with, in most cases, the first three being subsumed into an even better place to live. Further, Big Local areas are working on diverse issues to address these outcomes and the needs expressed by their communities. These range from play and youth work provision, undertaking environmental improvements, providing access to work support, benefits advice and addressing substance misuse. Delivery mechanisms also vary. Some areas focus on small grants to grass roots groups whilst others have entered into service level agreements with delivery partners or undertaken substantial capital projects.

In terms of [progress against each outcome](#):

- **Communities being better able to identify local needs and take action in response to them.** Partnerships, in the plan development stage, undertook a wide range of consultation activities. As they have moved into delivery this has been less of a priority, though partnerships are aware of the need to keep the wider community informed and engaged.
- **People having increased skills and confidence, so that they continue to identify and respond to needs in the future.** There is evidence that some partnerships and the individuals involved have developed the confidence to take difficult and complex decisions. Big Local partnerships, often through delivery partners, are developing the skills of local residents (e.g. access to employment) and the capacity of community groups locally.
- **The community is making a difference to the needs it prioritises.** Big Local partnerships have, in some instances, made a difference to the physical environment locally (e.g. green spaces/play areas) or have plans to do so where this has been identified as a priority. Individuals interviewed also reported that involvement with the partnership (or Big Local supported projects) had made a difference to their physical and mental wellbeing.

- **People feel that their area is an even better place to live.** Residents and partners report a range of ‘soft’ outcomes in relationship to this goal; the area had more activities – or services that were under threat had been protected. A greater level of community cohesion, reduced levels of social isolation and a better feeling about the community were also reported in some Big Locals.

Overall, whilst many areas have made real achievements, early progress against the defined outcomes has (inevitably, given the nature of the programme) been slower than anticipated and uneven. Whilst some have achieved their early objectives others have struggled and become ‘bogged down’ in issues of governance and partnership incorporation. Partnerships also report challenges in terms of engaging the wider community in the working of Big Local and can struggle to connect everyday activities in their area with their strategic vision for Big Local. Whilst change was reported by and for individuals and some groups, the ‘ripple effect’ of this into the wider community is, as yet, unclear.

Reflecting on progress to date, the key learning includes:

- Change, and embedding Big Local as a way of working takes time and is not a linear process
- Residents interviewed valued the more open-ended commitment of Big Local and delivery partners – rather than the increasing policy focus on brief interventions
- Like most area-based initiatives, measuring the impact of, and attributing change to, Big Local beyond anecdotal evidence can be challenging
- Wider community engagement can be problematic
- There are risks that partnerships become enmeshed in routine day to day management and activity at the cost of providing strategic direction and relating routine activity to their original vision for their community.

## 2.1 Introduction

Big Local was initially set up with four well publicised outcomes, which expressed the aspirations for the programme as a whole. Initially they were intended to articulate the underlying ethos of Big Local in that it is resident led – with local residents both identifying needs and then designing community plans that tailor responses to specific communities. This contrasted with many previous community change and regeneration initiatives where solutions being ‘imposed’ from the outside against pre-determined policy objectives and targets.

Initially, these look straightforward, simply expressed, and relatively discreet as four outcomes. Big Local areas have, however, often struggled to articulate these outcomes for a number of reasons:

- **Lack of clarity**

Several areas have found the initial outcomes too wordy and hard to promote to others in a meaningful way. Many tend to opt for just the ‘even better to place to live’ outcome. In particular, people do not necessarily see the difference between the first two outcomes around being better able to identify local needs and taking action, and have increased skills and confidence so that they continue to identify and respond to needs in the future. Exercises around the outcomes with case study partnerships illustrate that some members are not familiar with them at all and/or they use them interchangeably. They therefore record the same achievements across several outcomes which

raises questions about whether, for example, the objectives of making a difference and a better place to live fundamentally different.

- **Weighting and ordering**

Throughout the research, questions have arisen as to whether the outcomes work in a logical sequence such that for example, identifying needs and developing local skills and confidence to continue to identify needs are pre-requisites to making a difference and an even better place to live. It is not, therefore, always helpful to view Big Local solely through the lens of outcomes set at the start of the process. Future evaluations may want to take a broader view of change in neighbourhoods.

- **Measurement of outcomes**

Crucially, whilst the outcomes statements are perhaps deliberately broad, Big Local areas have also felt the challenge of measuring progress from needs analysis to delivering against the stated outcomes. Areas have also struggled with what constitutes sufficiently robust evidence of progress against, or achievement of, outcomes. Is anecdotal evidence of a better place to live sufficient or are some 'harder' outcome measures required (e.g. numbers gaining employment, reduction in crime rates etc.) as proxy measures which 'evidence' improvements in local circumstances? In a 'light touch' programme this is clearly a challenge – identified by one partnership chair, who stated that:

*'[Starting delivery] has made me aware that we have to put things in place at the start of a project so that we have a baseline to look back to.....Unfortunately it creates more work for over stretched volunteers unless paid workers are going to deal with the process.'*

(Partnership member)

The points above have implications for the way that Big Local partnerships express how they expect to meet outcomes, both in original plans, and in actual delivery. Developing skills and knowledge of individual residents and in local community groups, in some instances, is expressed simply as that – whereas for others, as noted, this outcome is subsumed into, and evidenced as, the overarching outcome of an even better place to live.

The following findings are, therefore, offered with the caveat that, rather than being distinct and discreet outcomes, there are substantial overlaps between each of the four Big Local aspirations and in how respondents talk about them.

## **2.2 Communities will be better able to identify local needs and take action in response to them**

### **Approaches towards meeting this outcome**

In the initial 'getting started' phase of the Big Local programme, the 15 areas involved in the evaluation took a range of approaches to identifying local needs. In the case of Lawrence Weston, for example, this process built on a pre-existing [community plan](#). In Whitley Bay the partnership commissioned its own consultation, engaging over 1,000 people, which then fed into the council's own planning process and the town's masterplan (see also Section 4.3: leadership and influence). In other areas, intelligence about local needs was based primarily on existing data and surveys – supplemented by consultation exercises. This, in itself, proved a challenging exercise as many Big Local areas are not coterminous with ward or constituency boundaries and the local population profile can, therefore, differ substantially from those of Office of National Statistics data sets. The work of the School for Public Health Research (SPHR), with Local Trust, to develop detailed

population profiles which are Big Local area/boundary specific has, therefore, been a welcome development for some areas (e.g. Birchfield, who use this information on a regular basis).

Most areas have, however, adopted a consultative approach, with extensive community consultations (supplemented by socio-economic data) informing initial needs assessments, followed by further consultations at the plan development stage. The tactics adopted have varied from area to area. In some cases, consultations took the form of large scale open meetings (e.g. Hanwell). In others, the approach was more targeted – using consultations with specific groups such as children and young people, older residents and local businesses (for example in [Blackpool Revoe](#)).

What emerges from the initial needs assessment work is that:

- The extent of engagement activities to ‘reach’ into communities at the stages of local profiling and plan development varied substantially. Areas that have robust statistics of ‘reach’ range from between 10% and the 50% as indicated in the NCVO [Community Engagement Report](#) (2016). The NCVO [Early Years evaluation](#) in 2015 concluded that, overall: *‘Steering groups and partnerships feel strongly that the process of research, consultation and engagement undertaken to get things started in their area has left them with a rich source of information on local needs from the perspective of people locally. The level of detail and evidence in profiles and plans is one of the strongest tangible indicators that areas have (or have developed) the ability to identify local needs.’* (p93).
- In terms of the current evaluation, the priorities identified by the participating areas, are broadly reflective of those in the wider programme – including the environment, community cohesion, jobs and economy, youth and health and wellbeing (as the top five priorities).

With the exception of Blackpool Revoe (see Blackpool Revoe [final plan consultation meeting film](#)), all the areas involved had completed their initial community profiles and plan consultations in advance of the current evaluation. What residents and partners were therefore asked to do as part of the data collection was to reflect back on their learning from those initial consultations and, where applicable, how these had informed activities around refreshing their delivery plans. In Grassland Hasmoor for example, they felt that the community profile identified the main areas of need. Since then, the partnership has frequently used community engagement questionnaires at activities and events, asking residents what they think is and is not working well or what is missing. They also encouraged the formation of working groups around themes in the plan run by residents not necessarily on the partnership, to identify and help to fill ‘gaps’. In Westfield Big Local, action groups such as gardening, craft, bake and taste groups are an easy source of ongoing consultation. The key has been to make best use of them and to ensure that those not attending activities are also consulted. To address this, they are planning door knocking around the area.

There is some early learning around approaches to engaging the wider community in identifying needs and taking action:

- **Publicity surrounding the allocation of £1million** to each area had not always been seen as helpful and had raised expectations of immediate spend on some areas. One chair noted that *‘people did not understand that this was resident led and that it takes time to find out what residents’ real needs are.’* Indeed, in a number of areas, including Blackpool Revoe, the assumption amongst the broader community was that the partnership was ‘sitting on’ £1 million.

- Some active residents perceived a **lack of guidance in the early stages from Local Trust** – though the learning from the first round of Big Local areas had informed the development of subsequent guidance which Big Locals in later rounds felt had been helpful and eased the planning process.
- Moving from **community profiling to plan development and delivery** had been slower than anticipated. In some cases this meant that early enthusiasm and momentum for the programme had been dissipated.
- The difficulty of **communicating to residents what ‘resident led’ meant**. In areas such as Lawrence Weston where there had been experience of previous regeneration programmes there was a reported community scepticism (based on that prior experience) about Big Local ‘being different’ and actually being resident led. This is picked up later in Section 4, Expectations.
- **Making the engagement meaningful** has been a challenge in some areas. There are examples of where residents have asked people to choose the things they think are most important in the area from a list of themes, only to find that everyone ticks everything and they are still no nearer to identifying what to offer and how. As one resident said:  
*‘(It’s) quite difficult when you say to somebody, out of the blue, any of us, me included, well what do you want? You think well I don’t know, and then if [we] say you get a few options, do you think so and so might work? And then they might go oh yes, that would be good, yes I would quite like that, so sometimes if you just leave it as an open thing, people really don’t know where to start thinking about it.’*  
 (Partnership member)

Others talked of the danger of people focusing on the negatives in their communities rather than the positives and the strengths.

- Promoting **community wide ownership** of Big Local has been a challenge. The NCVO Early Years report noted the tension between Big Local being seen as ‘*about the whole community*’ rather being, simply, the partnership, and seen as ‘*an organisation with funding*’  
 All the partnerships in this study commented on this, as one person stated:  
*‘My main priority is that power sits with the community and that the needs and ideas are generated from the community as a whole and not just our board but I find it hard with all of the strong voices and strong ideas we have on the board.’*  
 (Partnership member)

Across the 15 areas, partnership members questioned (and at times agonised over) whether they had reached beyond those residents and groups with the loudest voices: ‘*It’s harder to engage those who are hard to reach, or vulnerable and find out what can really make a difference in their lives*’ (Partnership member). A more detailed discussion of this issue, and how it may be resolved, is available in the film of the [networking and learning event in Ramsey](#).

- Linked to the point above, was the prioritising process when **negotiating the content of the plan**:  
*‘Locally, there were some people who had pet projects, however there were a lot of community members who got involved who wanted to work together as a whole*

*community to make sure that no one is left behind or doesn't feel welcome and that inspired me to stay involved.'* (Partnership member)

In the same vein, one partnership member talked about how the partnership was seen to have a 'big wedge' of cash which should fill the big holes on other organisations finances. At a second level, early consultations revealed, for example in Three Parishes, Whitley Bay and Hanwell, that, unexpectedly, a lot of activity was already happening locally 'below the radar':

*'In our area, because of what has gone before, there's a huge administrative task just to find out what's already provided ... bringing people and groups together.... to meet the needs of residents as opposed to passively taking what other organisations and their funders want to offer ... Not very exciting ... doesn't make interesting publicity ... but it is essential.'* (Paid worker)

This raised the challenge of developing plans which did not duplicate (or compete with) existing groups/activities, supported the development of those activities whilst not excluding new initiatives and, at the operational stage, co-ordinating activities so that the whole was greater than the parts. Ramsey Million is an example of where they have incentivised local groups to collaborate and add value to the whole through a Ramsey wide heritage project. Indeed co-ordination of activities and the promotion of inter-agency working became key themes of each of the networking and learning events in [Ramsey](#), [Birchfield](#), [Hanwell](#) and [Leeds](#).

### **Progress towards meeting this outcome**

So, are communities better able to identify needs and take action? Many started with some fairly straightforward understanding of needs, and responses e.g. litter picking activities as a result of people complaining about the environment, provision of activities to bring people together who said there was nothing to do. However, the learning from early plan consultations and subsequent development has informed further needs assessment work and in some areas the thinking has become more sophisticated:

- Intelligence from new and emerging projects has informed their needs analysis. In Northfleet, for example, *'We identified that about 60% of people using the Foodbank have mental health problems so that is something we want to do something about'*. (Delivery Partner)
- Workplans have been refined where needs identified in the initial plan, from experience, had not actually materialised. For example, in Hanwell, older people identified accessible local transport as a key issue, yet the subsequent Ring and Ride initiative was substantially under-used. What emerged at this stage was that what older people wanted was access to affordable transport for day trips and social activities rather than the individualised service initially identified. Similarly, Ramsey Million realised that its Wheels to Work scheme was not a 'goer' in their area, partly because local roads were unsafe for motorcycles. However, by promoting the scheme in Cambridgeshire, other areas have picked up the project.
- Open events, especially 'piggy backing' on other local organisations events (such as local carnivals etc.), have been used more frequently as a means of both reaching out – but also making Big Local more visible – and not expecting people to simply come to more formal

meetings. In some instances, therefore, needs analysis has become a more informal process – possibly less systematic but with greater reach than in the initial phases.

- The way that plans are expressed has changed in some areas – with the use of much simpler language in public facing plans:

*‘Needs may not have changed. Not really...but the way that we express those needs and aspirations has changed...Basically four years ago (in the original plan) the language was too business like, too academic so has changed. So we cut it down in terms that are a bit more accessible and understandable’. (Partnership member)*

### **Learning in relation to this outcome**

There is a growing learning within partnerships of the challenges in matching needs assessment, priority setting and delivery. Awareness and reflection of the dilemmas partnerships face in identifying needs has included the fear of ‘over-consultation’ (so called ‘consultation fatigue’) where what people actually want to see is delivery on the ground) on the one hand, with awareness of the risks of not being seen to consult and involve on the other:

*‘Well we haven’t done consultation with the wider community for a while.... we do have a newsletter, asking people to respond to certain things, but we haven’t done that wide consultation we did when we first started.’ (Partnership member)*

For others, ongoing consultation is an essential part of the Big Local process – where ‘*communication is the key. Big Local needs to reach out to people and keep in touch when they click into Big Local so that people feel a part of [it].*’ (Partnership member)

In many cases, initial plans and subsequent plan revisions have identified the opportunities to realise long hoped for developments (e.g. the Play Park in Barrowciff had been ‘on the cards’ for 10 years – or the skate park in Grassland Hasmoor – on the agenda for 10 years plus) or ‘quick wins’ around environmental improvements. However, what happens when there is agreement about the issues that need to be addressed as an urgent priority – but no agreement between residents as to what the solution is? Blackpool Revue, for example, has identified drug and alcohol misuse as a visible and underlying problem in the area – but then the community is deeply divided between those that ‘want the druggies out’ and those for whom what is required is access to support, earlier interventions and treatment options (see Snapshot 1). As noted, the identification of (a common) need does not always translate smoothly into an agreed workplan.



### Snapshot 1: Blackpool Revoe -Tackling the ‘hard’ issues.

Blackpool Revoe (The Revoelution) is amongst the 10 most deprived neighbourhoods in England (along with four other wards in Blackpool). On the one hand it has a stable population – with two or three generations of families reported as living locally. On the other hand, it is a community undergoing change. There is a growing Polish and Romanian community, for example, and an increasing number of properties in multiple occupation with transient tenants.

In both the Revoe [Community Profile](#) in early 2014 and the subsequent [Community Plan](#) (December 2015) there was a consensus amongst residents that the key issue in the neighbourhood was the misuse of illegal drugs. There has been, however, no agreement on the solution to this issue. For some, including the partnership, those using illegal substances needed earlier interventions and support – particularly given lengthy waiting times for treatment. For others, who reported feeling unsafe on the streets (particularly at night) the answer was ‘*getting rid of the druggies.*’ The tensions around this issue were evident at the Revoelution’s final [plan consultation meeting](#) in December 2015.

After extensive consultations and negotiations, they adopted a twin approach. The Revoelution is supporting a range of community safety measures – including CCTV and improving shop front security, **and** is supporting the Hepatitis C local drop in sessions and has commissioned drug support and life coaching services.

*‘Some people in this area have given up and can’t see any way out of anything. A revo(e)lution is about change and we’d like them to have that hope – to be able to change.’* (Partnership member)

Then, there is the issue of not only continuing to engage with, or reach out to ‘the quieter voices’ within established communities, but how to involve newly arrived groups: for example the Romanian community in Blackpool and emerging Polish groups in Lawrence Weston. For some rural Big Locals the profile of new arrivals is rather different: housing developments in, for example, Ramsey, Radstock and the Three Parishes, are attracting more affluent residents who are (or are likely to be) out-commuters to neighbouring, larger, centres of employment. Identifying and responding to needs in communities will be an ongoing challenge for partnerships. However, in the plan refresh process, there has been a feeling that, whatever the change in local populations, the underlying needs of access to employment, promoting health and wellbeing and a clean and green environment will remain the same.

Learning around this outcome is summed by:

*‘If I could go back to the beginning with the knowledge and experience I have now I would do things differently. I recognise that you cannot expect already overworked volunteers from deprived areas to find the time to give it the best start..... Resident led is a great idea but it needs to start with every individual being completely informed and given the opportunity to engage and participate.’* (Partnership member)

## 2.3 People have increased skills and confidence, so that they continue to identify and respond to needs in the future

### Approaches to meeting this outcome

*‘I would love BL to be about realising that everyone’s skills and experience is valuable and not just those skills that may be valued in the workplace but also the skills that are harder to*



*measure but are integral to building a strong community the greatest of which I believe are diversity and equality.’ (Partnership member)*

Whilst there are a number of residents who have long histories of community activism or paid employment in voluntary organisations, there is also a consistent story, for newer members, of the transformational experience of becoming involved in Big Local partnerships or sub-groups.

Residents talk about ‘never having done anything like this before’ – from simply attending meetings through to taking decisions on spend, acting as secretary to the partnership or leading a working group on a local issue they feel passionate about. One person talked about being ‘*a bit like a rabbit in the headlights*’ with little idea of what was going on, ‘*I thought what am I supposed to be doing, what is this all about, what is my role? So I’m listening.*’ (Partnership member)

*‘We’re a lot more knowledgeable now about how to do things. We’re still not there yet. We know a lot more about the community and how to do things. The small grants have given us a lot of insight into what’s going on in the area, because we didn’t know there were all different sorts of groups. So I personally think we’ve learned a lot through that. The whole thing is a learning curve. Experience. We’re growing all the time in what we can help, how we can help and the more people that find out about us, the more we can help.’ (Partnership member)*

Many of the 15 partnerships have learnt a lot about community priorities and different ways of responding to identified needs through running small grants programmes, as in the quote above. They are building their skills and confidence through ‘trying things out’ and reflecting on what works without apportioning blame. In Grassland Hasmoor they are developing new processes such as participatory budgeting and building their confidence to do this well through looking at what has worked well, and less well, elsewhere. In Barrowcliff the Monday morning breakfast meetings and the coffee morning ‘drop-ins’ in Lawrence Weston have proven a reliable way of bring new people and new ideas to the table, thus enabling a continuous route to making needs known and generating solutions. In most Big Locals studied, there is an openness to reflecting on past activities and learning from them, For example:

- Barrowcliff Big Local for example, is open about the fact that some of their previous approaches e.g. the Opportunities Day, was not what people wanted, as evidenced by the fact that not many people turned up (though it was a useful networking opportunity for agencies). Reflecting on the [best bits, the hard bits and doing the things others can not do](#), the vice chair of Barrowcliff Big Local suggested that, rather than a ‘scattergun’ approach, what they needed was a more targeted ‘sniper rifle’ approach.
- Lawrence Weston developed an [Employment Hub](#) to promote local residents’ access to employment in the Avonmouth docks. Initial take up was slow – in part due to falling unemployment rates in the area. The project was redesigned to work with those furthest from the labour market, identifying barriers to work and is establishing a more individually tailored mentoring scheme.
- The Bountagu partnership has similar reflections, stressing that Big Local is not an exact science and everyone has learnt by doing:  
*‘... tried different things, and things that we thought were going to be flag waving things have really ditched and dived. And some things that we didn’t expect, have worked really really well.’ (Paid worker)*

## Progress towards meeting this outcome

Skills and confidence are developing:

- within partnerships, at a collective and individual level
- in the projects and community groups supported by Big Local.

### Within partnerships

Confidence and skills level have increased within the Big Local partnerships as they have developed and resident partners have become more experienced:

*'Having been involved from the start, yes it's a big ask. But for some it has been a lovely process. When you came to our meeting and [partnership member] said yes I'll do [that], he never ever would have done that... so to see that confidence grow. Most of the people on the partnership have never been to a meeting never mind being involved in something like Big Local with £1m and it's a big ask to get them to think about how they spend that. Once they got their heads round that, when the grants of more than £20k/£30k are more than their annual pay, then, two or three years in, they could do it – yes, £30k that sounds reasonable.'*  
(Partnership member)

A key dimension to this has been residents feeling that, perhaps for the first time, their views are taken seriously and not dismissed 'out of hand'. This has provided them with a confidence that they can 'grow' their projects and manage Big Local resources:

*'Partnership board membership has empowered residents to increase a) personal confidence, b) articulate 'needs' of their community.'* (Paid worker)

Two Big Local partnerships have identified a growth in confidence through the practice of evaluating project proposals

*'Partnership members have greater confidence in what we do ..... Partnership has learnt the value of assessing bids – increased their own ability.'*

*'We did have projects that came to the table, and we didn't just accept those projects for what they were, and between all of us we questioned the projects, we questioned value for money, we questioned whether they were actually delivering to our areas. We offered our services as somebody who had knowledge and expertise, so I think for me that responsibility for that money was well and truly shared, ... and that was all for the benefit of the residents. ....given us far more confidence now to actually make decisions.'* (Partnership members)

The actions of partnerships may be collective but the experience is very much at an individual level. For some residents, especially where there is a consciously supportive culture in the partnership, the involvement has been a transformative experience (see Snapshot 2) in terms of their confidence and the skills they have built.

As noted earlier in the report, some partnership members have gone on to become paid workers for Big Local or in one their supported projects. These people are now using the skills they learned as volunteer partnership members to continue to identify and respond to local needs in their paid work.

### **Snapshot 2: A Partnership member's experience – Jodie Montgomery, Ramsey Million**

*'As the consultation and the last events came to an end, the steering group were then putting together the plan on what the Partnership was going to entail, who could apply etc. and they had an event that I went to find out about what being a Partnership member entailed, what we needed to do... I went along and I noticed that ..... I was one of the youngest in the room and there wasn't that many people on the families and children side.*

*..... so I felt that I needed to stay involved to make sure that families and children were represented.*

*.....It's been a huge learning curve, it really has. People have got so many different personalities. Learning when to say something and when not to say something, and sometimes just saying something even though you know that you're going to get a bad response from someone. But you just say it anyway because if you do not say it then you do not get your point across. I still struggle with words and how to say it to make sure that they understand how it's coming out of my brain. But I get there in the end. But, no, it's been good.*

*.....We have a discussion over what we feel, so if we've got any questions we want to raise on the understanding of things, whether the project involves the training, if we're coming together as a collaboration with another group, who is providing what, any questions anyone has got, they ask. And when nobody else has got anything else to ask and we all feel that we understand it enough we then vote. ... I've got a better understanding of how things work. They will do what they need to do to make sure that you can be involved.'*

### **Across the community**

There is also some evidence across Big Locals that that skills and confidence are being built at a broader level than the partnership and its members. [Ramsey Million](#) is becoming seen as the 'go to' body by other community groups and agencies. It has advised others on how to identify needs, carried out work to further identify what is needed and passed this on and has tried to ensure that local people involved in projects build their skills too. Firstly, for example, it commissioned a piece of work to look at the town's community spaces with a view to identifying the space available with what was required. It funded others to do this work so that it was seen as having some independence from the Big Local partnership and thus enabling different groups in the town to be involved in the decision making process. Secondly, young people who joined the Ramsey youth project, *Crunch*, have been supported to become volunteers and participated in training sessions to become youth workers - they are now '*giving back*' and planning sessions and relevant activities.

Several Big Locals believe that their grants process has taught groups how to make better funding bids, therefore raising their ability to increase income. In some areas, this has been a conscious activity (e.g. Grassland Hasmoor Big local has stipulated match funding for all its activity, thus pushing groups to identify additional funding sources). Similarly in the commissioning and contracting arrangements in Blackpool Revue and Hanwell, those bidding are required to demonstrate the 'added value' they bring to Big Local. In Growing Together Big Local, they have tapered their large grant funding to encourage organisations to build their skills, be more resourceful and, hopefully, sustainable beyond Big Local.

In the Three Parishes, the flexibilities afforded by Big Local funding mechanisms has enabled the partnership to redesign the Credit Union workplan to address the slow start to the initiative and address financial literacy with children and young people (see Snapshot 3).

### Snapshot 3: Three Parishes - Identifying and responding to emerging needs

The Three Parishes Big Local identified the difficulties some residents were having in accessing mainstream banking and affordable financial services in a deep rural area. As a result some were turning to high interest/pay day loan companies or even loan sharks (because they were more anonymous).

In response, Three Parishes Big Local worked with FAIRshare Credit Union in Shrewsbury and Telford to offer services for two hours each week in Gobowen, Western Rhyn and St. Martins. Take up was, however, slow. One of the reasons given for this included difficulty in educating people about the benefits of credit union membership and the stigma that could be associated with being seen to use a Credit Union point in a rural community.

The partnership reviewed the approach being taken with FAIRshare and revised the workplan. This now means no weekly one to one sessions, greater marketing focus promoting FAIRshare's development of an online membership application, allowing members to apply at a time that suits them and less publicly. There is less direct service delivery time (one hour per week in each area), but greater outreach to encourage take-up and the development of credit union services on line.

In addition, a children's savings club has been successfully established in one of the local primary schools. This last development was seen, not only as a way to encourage a culture of saving at an early age, but also as a way to reach out to parents and encourage them to join and save, without the issue of stigma. The early results of this change of course approach have been promising – particularly with the savings club where children have been recruited to take on a range of banking roles and this has been built into the school day curriculum. The other two primary schools in the area have expressed an interest in extending this scheme. For more information see the Three Parishes [‘Using Small Grants’](#) video.

### Learning in relation to this outcome

This increased confidence in decision making and the skills to take decisions on complex issues, is not a simple process. In terms of awarding contracts under a commissioning process, for example, the chair of one Big Local noted:

*‘[The organisations] all gave great presentations and had much to offer us but only one can be chosen. This is hard when as part of a small community you know these people and their work. It should feel like you have power and influence but it feels like a responsibility that your decision could come back and bite you if we get it wrong and I don't like upsetting people. Let's hope we didn't.’* (Partnership member)

However, the long term time frame of Big Local has meant that resident partners have been able to learn and develop at their own pace – rather than against pre-determined deadlines. They feel they have the permission to withdraw for periods if there are difficulties in their personal lives or are simply too busy – and then return. Indeed, as noted, for a number of residents initial activity with the partnership has resulted in becoming employed – either as development workers or administrators within their Big Local. Partners attending Local Trust Spring Events, chairs meetings and learning

workshops particularly valued these opportunities for peer learning. This applied not simply to gaining technical knowledge (for example sessions on measuring impact), but the chance to share challenges, explore solutions and, where a Big Local area faces particularly difficult issues (either in the way a partnership is working or problems with plan delivery) building a sense that *‘we are not alone’* in this.

*‘...but we proved ourselves wrong, that we can do it! And as you say, ruddy hard work but we got there in the end!’*  
(Partnership member)

## 2.4 The community is making a difference to the needs it prioritises

### Approaches to meeting this outcome

Big Local areas have adopted a range of strategies to make a difference in their area. These include:

- A community development approach aimed at creating more ‘neighbourliness’, pride in the community and stimulating small scale community activities led by residents (e.g. Bountagu)
- The use of small grants to stimulate or extend community based activity (e.g. Radstock, Whitley Bay and Three Parishes)
- Project/service delivery funding through larger/established voluntary organisations –through grants and commissioning (e.g. Blackpool Revue, Catton Grove, Growing Together) and Service Level Agreements (e.g. Hanwell) with a system of payment in-arrears against outcomes
- Brokerage – improving the co-ordination of existing local groups and services (e.g. Whitley Bay, Ramsey)
- Acting as strategic change agents – through aiming to attract substantial inward investment and radical physical change within the area (see Snapshot 17: Lawrence Weston)
- A combination of all, or some, of the above.

### Progress towards meeting this outcome

Big Local actions can be clustered around five key themes: environmental improvements; promoting health and wellbeing; strengthening and celebrating a sense of community; stimulating new activities which meet local needs and work with children and young people.

**Making a physical and environmental difference** is a theme that runs throughout all 15 Our Bigger Story areas. Examples include:

- The development of static play equipment areas. These vary in scale from the creation of an entire play park in [Barrowcliff](#) through to the proposed skate-park in Grassland Hasmoor and smaller scale developments in Lawrence Weston, [North Northfleet and the Growing Together area](#)
- Improvements to green and open spaces and improved [paths and walkways e.g. Grassland Hasmoor Big local](#)
- Allotment developments aimed at encouraging young people to become involved in growing vegetables (Radstock) or as a space to enable people to come together in a safe space (e.g. Catton Grove, adults with mental health problems in Birchfield)
- Providing hanging baskets and street planters in local shopping areas – for example in Whitley Bay.

A slightly different approach to the environment has been developed around local heritage. In [Birchfield](#) this has involved creating heritage walks which raise residents' awareness of local history through to, at a larger scale, substantial investment in enhancing local heritage sites in [Ramsey](#) as a means of attracting tourism and supporting the local economy (see also Snapshot 4). Similarly, Radstock Big Local has been working with the Town Centre Team to *'make Radstock a place where people want to stop – and shop - rather than just drive through.'* (Paid worker)

#### **Snapshot 4: Ramsey Heritage Project**

In April 2015 Ramsey Million Partnership commissioned Cambridgeshire ACRE to run a project to raise the profile of Ramsey Parish. Ramsey has many historical and natural attractions as well as a wide selection of independent retailers. This project aims to inject some vitality into the town, bring visitors into the area, increase footfall in the town and spending in local shops, as well as encouraging local people to have pride in their town and the surrounding villages and Fen landscape.

With its own branding, *Discover Ramsey* has organised a number of events over the last two years, brought the different heritage groups together, and created a dedicated website to profile the history and help people get the most out of visiting Ramsey.

In 2016, two events held in September helped put *Discover Ramsey* on the map:

The first was free entry to seven heritage venues with a vintage bus taking people round all the sites. Visitors records at all the heritage sites were more than ever before and at one site, visitor numbers were up by two thirds on the previous year.

At the second event - Craft Saturday – there were more than 30 stalls, people brand new to trading, interspersed with more experienced traders, were busy all day as were the local shops who posted on Facebook that this was their busiest ever; *'Brought a buzz to the town.'*

And this is not just about visitors, the Big Local's money and expertise is investing in encouraging more residents to come out of their houses, and they see this as opening up local volunteering opportunities.

The second common theme relates to activities which aim to **make a difference to the health and wellbeing** of individual local residents through activities such as:

- fitness classes (Barrowcliff's [Biggest Loser](#) – see also Snapshot 5)
- social groups which aim to overcome social isolation – particularly amongst older people: for example ['Men in Sheds'](#) in Three Parishes and Grassland Hasmoor, the many coffee morning/afternoon tea type drop ins at Bountagu, Growing Together's older people's clubs
- those using alcohol and illegal drugs in Blackpool Revue.

#### **Snapshot 5: Barrowcliff - The biggest loser and a winning community**

Barrowcliff Big Local funded Scarborough fitness centre, Compass Gym, to run an innovative weight-loss project, The Biggest Loser, in the heart of the community. 40 plus local residents embraced the challenge to get active and transform their lives. This directly resulted in:

- a collective total weight loss of 138.9lbs - one pound short of 10 stones
- 924 centimetres lost.

But the story goes further than this:

- **community links:** Barrowcliff Big Local is concerned about the extent of loneliness in the area and aware that people will cross the road rather than speak to each other. The project has brought people together, they walk home from the sessions together; and to inject a bit of motivation the project participants were split into two teams which meant they supported each other to lose weight and become the winning team
- **individual benefit:** one young person, on a 'Uniformed Services' college course, wanted to join the armed services but was overweight and therefore did not meet the criteria. Motivated by the Biggest Loser project, he lost 2 stones in weight and started a new job in the army.

**What next?** Barrowcliff Big Local will run the project again, and already has 30 people signed up. It recognises though that they need to reach out beyond the 'same' people – they could have 20 people who are healthy and fit but want to reach the other 1,200 people on the estate. This is their biggest challenge.

In many ways these are small scale initiatives – certainly in terms of financial support – but can have a substantial impact on the lives of local residents:

*'Finding this community group has genuinely been a life changer for me. The music and social aspect of this group has made a very significant contribution to my physical and mental health whilst renewing my interest in my community.'* (Local resident)

*'It's not just a health and wellbeing group... it spun out into a reading group and we'll support that. The gardens and allotment group...it's not just about growing things. It's a space for people without gardens or people who have mental health problems who just want somewhere peaceful to sit.'* (Partnership member)

The third common theme is **celebration and community events**. Initiatives include:

- Carnivals and fun-days ([Bountagu](#), [Hanwell](#), Westfield, Whitley Bay)
- Farmer's and craft markets (North Northfleet, Ramsey Million, Whitley Bay)
- Christmas celebrations. By sponsoring the Christmas lights in Hanwell, the Big Local partnership reported that the area no longer felt *'the poor relation'* to neighbouring parts of Ealing:

*'The idea of soft outcomes is very important, because I mean that event that we had down the local shops which is a result of sponsoring a trading association, it really gives the immediate area around it a lift.'* (Partnership member)

Such events are increasingly being used not simply as events 'in their own right' but as a means of promoting community cohesion, bringing together diverse communities (or estates where there has been a history of tension) and *'part of the agenda here was making people feel better about, and take pride, in the area they lived in,'* (Partnership member). Further, they are also a forum for community consultation e.g. Barrowcliff Big Local combined its [annual general meeting](#) with a family fun day, and, as in Ramsey, they raise the profile of Big Local in their own areas as well as helping improve perceptions of the area to outsiders.

This sense of using events as a means of **creating, or recreating, community spirit** is closely linked to the development of community hubs: spaces which bring together communities and services. There



are, already, successful examples – for example in Bountagu (where the hub has been described as ‘like a home from home’, see Snapshot 6), and in Blackpool Revue (where services are beginning to be delivered in a co-ordinated way) as well as in [Catton Grove](#), Westfield and the [Growing Together](#) Big Local areas.

#### **Snapshot 6: Bountagu Community Hub**

*‘Bountagu is a diverse community and the focus is on integration, building community spirit and a sustainable future.’ (Bountagu strapline).*

The community hub is a physical space, housed in an old betting shop in a parade of shops, but in fact has generated a community spirit which extends much more widely.

For a small space, a lot goes on. Mondays it’s information and advice and help with form filling, an afternoon tea, and an over 50s lunch. Tuesday offers conversational English, IT skills and ‘Hang Out’ youth club; Wednesday brings a job club, coffee morning, Wi-Fi support, enterprise and business advice and a young people’s enterprise club. Thursdays include a drop-in, ‘Hang Out’ youth club, youth forum and on Fridays there is a coffee morning, a befriending programme and keep fit.

A key **outcome is in the connections people make**- finding out what they need, and then finding ways to help. *‘So it is kind of making them personally happier, more contented, and it is also about making them proud to live here again, because for the last 30 years or so, people have felt ashamed to live here, rather than proud to live here. So it is about the whole community, and it is also about individuals. ...It makes them feel important as well.’ (Partnership member)*

Residents note that people in the area seem more relaxed, friendly and smile more. *‘We see that people stop out here, they look in the window yes, but they are actually now talking to each other, so it is a kind of talking point, even if they don’t come in. And they bring stuff in, .... give it to us to give to the community.’* The flowerbeds outside have also made a difference – residents are encouraged to plant them or bring plant donations into the shop: *‘people care about the area, confidence, sense of pride and belonging. The flowers have had a major effect on people’s emotional kind of ... wellbeing, I know it sounds like a bit over the top, but .... they get a sense of it as theirs.’ (Partnership member)*

There were five deaths in the community last year. The 50+ groups and buddying service helped families and friends deal with the grief by coming together in the community – across all ethnicities and faiths with the community attending funerals from all religions. Bountagu helped with the funerals when there was no one else. *‘So for the last two years, those people have had community, they have had friends, they have had things to do, they have had people to look out for them. ...Bountagu residents have been their family.’ (Partnership member)*

Some areas, desperate for a community space, have expended substantial energies on trying to identify, or negotiate management of, potential community hubs, (see Westfield Snapshot 7), some are in the process of creating the legal structures for doing so, but some have to date made little or no progress. This issue is addressed further in the final section of the current report.



### Snapshot 7: Westfield Big Local gets a community space

*'And it's a big thing, because it's the only thing this community's got. We haven't got a doctors, we haven't got a library, we haven't got a church, we've got nothing.'* (Partnership member)

Westfield is an outer estate, 8 miles from the centre of Sheffield. There are few facilities on the estate. In the last year the doctors' surgery has closed for the second time. The only community facility, the Com.Unity Centre, is a community centre based in an old pub building, run for many years by the local authority. Primarily used as a youth centre, it was only open at limited times each week, and despite banks of computers, a gym, a café and meeting space, was underused by the local community.

*'You know, before Big Local, the council had got this as a centre. I didn't even know anything about it and I've lived on this estate for 40 year.'* (Partnership member)

Westfield Big Local has prioritised taking on the management of the Com.Unity Centre. It is now open every day – but it has been a turbulent journey. It has taken two and a half years of *'hard nosed bargaining'*, a lot of this time taken up with toing and froing with the legal department in the council. Negotiations with the council have been protracted – resisting the rent payments originally specified, alongside restrictions to its use. The residents were supported through a pro bono solicitor and a surveyor from Sheffield Hallam University. This meant they were able to present a lot of documentation about the condition of the building. The partnership feels that presenting this level of technical information surprised the council and went way beyond the information the council had itself, *'Sheffield Council realised that they'd got a battle on their hands.'* (Partnership member)

The group also benefited from the advice of a Social Investment Rep who helped with understanding building regulations. The partnership's advice to any other groups attempting something similar would be to get specialists involved (in Westfield's case this was all free support) as this made a big difference, and to minute every meeting with written and signed decisions.

*'I think that we went in there with these blinkers. We thought it would be over and done with in a month, to be honest.'* (Partnership member)

There are different approaches though to asset transfer and management. In Hanwell, rather than the Big Local taking on the asset of the community centre from the local authority, the partnership is supporting a consortium of local agencies to take on a management role – though asset transfer negotiations have been protracted (see Snapshot 8). Three Parishes has used its role as a broker, not to fund the transition of a local library into a community resource, but to bring agencies together to support and manage this process.

#### **Snapshot 8: Hanwell Big Local - Collaborating around community space**

[Hanwell Community Centre](#) is a large Victorian building and historic landmark which was originally an orphanage in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The Centre is currently run by Ealing Council and houses a range of activities: from sports and fitness groups, a nursery, arts and crafts groups as well as meeting rooms, office space for local projects a large sports hall suitable for events and a recently opened café.

The Centre, however, has had to be subsidised in recent years and the Council has decided to tender out the management arrangements. Rather than bidding, Hanwell Big Local has supported the development of a consortium of local organisations to become constituted and submit a tender (Hanwell Community Centre Consortium). A final decision has yet to be reached on awarding the contract (this is now expected in March/April 2017) – though the Consortium developed a business case and successfully negotiated the initial expression of interest and tendering process and has been selected as one of two preferred bidders.

This approach has not only enabled a range of local groups to spread the financial risk of taking on the Centre but also offers the opportunity for the Consortium to bid for additional resources to improve the fabric of the building and its facilities. As the Centre is a building of historic importance, this includes potential Heritage Lottery funds.

In terms of making a difference, small grants and project funding are **stimulating both new and greater levels of activity** (see Snapshot 9). For example, in [North Northfleet](#), for example, CAS Training Solutions started out as a volunteer led 'job club'. Funding from Big Local enabled the project to expand the number of initial days it opened and, subsequently, enabled them to attract additional matched funding and begin to deliver training, advice guidance and counselling for Job Centre Plus. As noted, CAS has been particularly successful in getting local residents into employment, and this is picked up in the difference that Big Local is making to individuals.

#### **Snapshot 9: Making a difference for projects – A community allotment in Birchfield**

*'The community allotment actually got going and was very successful. We pick up people who've got learning difficulties from local hostels and we take them along to the allotment, and we've now got a manager of the allotment who works 16 hours and we show them how to grow food, how to cook it when it's grown, on wet days we do art groups with them, you know, we get them involved with the earth and with all that that means to them, but one of the offshoots of that was we decided to take part in Britain in Bloom, It's Your Neighbourhood. That's had a really, really big impact.....*

*We were getting little bits of grants from all over the place, so the manager was spending a lot of his time continually applying for bits of grants to keep it going. But, when Big Local started, we actually got a grant from them which meant he knew that he had an income for two years, he didn't have to spend all his time applying for bits of grants all over the place, and we could get on with actually doing stuff in the community. So we expanded the allotment project, we started to do a lunch club where people in the local community could drop in, get some food that we'd grown on the allotment, and meet other people in the community.*

*Because we'd got so many people involved coming along, we had four or five open days where people could come along and make hanging baskets, plant pots up, and we gave them all material*

*and showed them how to do it, and we actually involved about 500 people. And it's quite a small area, Birchfield, so that's a lot of people to involve from a small area.'* (Partnership member)

It is one thing to stimulate activity, and another to help it become a sustainable activity built upon robust evidence of need and use. The two examples below, illustrate how Big Local has helped to start something that has developed a life of its own:

- The commission by Growing Together to Free2talk for youth work services has given this relatively new youth work Community Interest Company (CIC) a track record which it can use to help secure other contracts. As a small and very new organisation it was difficult to attract funding but the Growing Together work has enabled Free2talk to better understand how it needs to reflect on, and evaluate, its work. Free2talk has been able to use this evidence about the youth work process and its relevance to the Growing Together area. This has helped it to contribute to a partnership bid for a large contract and cite Growing Together as making *'a real difference to our organisation'*.
- Scarborough and Ryedale Community Cycling Community Interest Company (CIC) was a small, non-profit making, organisation which provides cycling opportunities for everyone, including those with limited mobility. Its first event was at Gallows Close Community Centre in December 2014, funded through Barrowcliff Big Local, as an activity for older people in the area. This brought the CIC to the attention of a national cycling charity and it has since been able to expand its services; building and providing more accessible bikes and trikes, and running cycle hire schemes, still in Barrowcliff but also now beyond the county boundaries.

In a number of instances, the success of a project supported by Big Local has also given groups the confidence to move on and try new approaches and develop new projects. In [Radstock and Westfield](#), for example, Swallows ran successful Zumba classes with adults with a learning disability. A second small grant has allowed them to expand their current community café into producing preserves as part of a sustainable social enterprise.

For some, early spend has been a useful way of promoting the Big Local concept of resident led change, publicising Big Local, and addressing initial resident scepticism about the programme: *'When we started there was a lot of apathy but that has change because things have started happening.'* (Partnership member). Further, the flexibilities and lack of bureaucracy attached to the small grants scheme (run in Radstock as a Dragon's Den event rather than through a detailed application process, and in Whitley Bay as very small 'Small Sparks' grants to individuals) has meant that *'We can just get on and do things without jumping through hoops.'* (Small grant recipient). For other areas, the focus has been on 'soft outcomes' sought through community development activities, as in the Bountagu snapshot (8), and in Birchfield, the recruitment of a volunteer co-ordinator has facilitated the development of a range of volunteer led initiatives, including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) support, an older people's social club and the Stepping Forward employment and training advice service. These initiatives aim to make a difference by addressing the social isolation felt by older residents and those whose first language is not English.

**Making a difference to children and young people** is common throughout the Big Local plan priorities, and there are examples of initiatives aimed at addressing this in every Big Local area. Several areas offer a range of provision (illustrated in Snapshot 10), to ensure they meet the needs of different age groups, but also to provide a range of 'ways in' for young people

### Snapshot 10: Growing Together Big Local - Youth work

Creating new opportunities for young people has become the principal focus of the Growing Together programme. In part, this is due to a widespread belief among partnership members and in the wider community that improving the life-chances of the youngest members of the community is probably the most effective way to bring about lasting improvements to the estates. There is also an awareness that the other side of investing in young people is reducing anti-social behaviour. Growing Together has:

- paid for four new play areas and bought two youth shelters, each with its own exercise equipment
- funded youth clubs run by Free 2 Talk, paid for adventurous outdoor activity youth programmes run by [Change of Scene](#), contributed to Reelscape's film based youth programmes and covered the cost of Impact Now's education support youth work on three estates, as well as given a grant to the Scouts.
- Made 29 small grants to organisations working with children or teenagers

In total there were 3,568 young people reported as using Growing Together funded children's and youth activities. This number reflects the fact that some young people almost certainly benefitted several times. However additional children and young people were involved in other Big Local funded activities, including use of the new play and teen facilities, which have not been quantified. Assuming maximum overlap a minimum of 950 (out of 2500 in the area) individual children and teenagers have benefitted and it is probably much higher.

#### Play areas

The very large majority of the play facilities originally installed on the estates have been removed or taken out of use long ago. Restoration of public play equipment availability was the single most frequently mentioned suggested use of the £1m during the initial consultations. The partnership therefore set a target of creating a new play facility on each of the five estates.

*'We wanted a park over here for a long time - the others are too far away to go to very often. We come here three or four times a week, usually when we're playing football. It's much easier.'* (Group of 14 year olds)

*'The play areas are absolutely great. They're the right things in the right places. They're well used and the locals seem very happy with them. Rillwood Court's given something to the older kids that they didn't have before and the Bird's Hill Road one is especially well used from 2 to 4 in the afternoons, after school. No one's complained to me or said they're a waste of money.'* (Council Neighbourhood Warden)

#### Youth work

Free 2 Talk have run two Growing Together funded youth clubs in the area with associated detached activity through-out the period. The two clubs, run on a drop-in basis, have been for 8 to 11 year olds and 12+ year olds. Free 2 Talk have also run a number of other projects, supported by Small Grants Fund grants and have played a key role in the development and design of the two youth shelters, ensuring that local young people were involved in the creation of a facility that would be their own space on the estates. A recent case study shows the impact engagement with Free 2 Talk can have. A group of eight young people had stopped coming to the club and had started to become isolated from other young people. The majority were out of school/employment and they had come to recognise that they needed help. Their initial behaviour on returning was challenging and attention seeking and youth workers had to help them to resolve some issues without resorting to fighting. Through the use of music and internet based sharing

activities with others, they are becoming re-integrated socially into the wider group and better able to manage themselves appropriately.

*'If we hadn't had the money, then the situation now would be very different. The play areas and youth shelters wouldn't be there and the Junior Wardens programme might not be running. There would have been no Free 2 Talk activity on Blackthorn ... We wouldn't be where we are now and I think the challenges would be greater. I've got nothing but good to say of how the money's been used.'* (Delivery Partner)

Many of the examples provided in this section of the report are at the level of intention, process and activity, rather than evidence of real community change. At this stage in the programme, that is perhaps understandable. However valuable these activities may be as a mechanism for stimulating grass roots activity, the question remains (and is commented upon further in the concluding sections of this report) as to the extent to which these approaches (or indeed project/service funding) can address the structural causes of poverty and inequality which characterise most of the Big Local communities.

Some Big Local partnerships are doing their best to remedy the social inequality they have identified. It is a regular conversation in Westfield where they try to ensure that all their, and other organisations', activities are open to all, and provide a combination of a savings scheme and bursaries to make that happen. Grassland Hasmoor Big Local has focused a lot of its planned activity on alleviating poverty in one way or another, for example, the Holiday Hunger Project, welfare rights advice and the Pit Stop Diner (see Snapshot 11).

#### **Snapshot 11: Grassland Hasmoor Big Local - Pit Stop Diner**

This initiative is delivered by volunteers and was originally set up by Grassland Hasmoor Big Local (GHBL) working with Public Health Adult Care. The Pit Stop Diner is open on the first Saturday of every month at Grassmoor Community Centre. A team of around 15 volunteers deliver the project with support from GHBL and Public Health. The team receive the delivery on a Tuesday ready for creating the menu and putting on Facebook to publicise. On the Friday volunteers pick up excess surplus food from Tesco. The event takes place on the Saturday - this is when volunteers are at full capacity.

The event strives to bring residents of different backgrounds to come along, enjoy a meal and socialise with other members of their community. The dedicated volunteers at the diner are a mix of young people looking to gain experience and who can learn new skills from the more experienced volunteers.

The original idea was to provide a meal and help to alleviate poverty in the area. However, the Pit Stop Diner is open to all and was not set up solely for poverty-related issues, it is also the social enrichment aspect that is highly valued and key to many residents that attend. The Pit Stop Diner now strives to cultivate community cohesion and improve health and well-being for the local communities - creating lasting change and developing community spirit. David Maric, board member at Big Local, said: *'It is about getting that pride back in the village ... It is not just for the elderly, it is for the young people as well. It is about getting them together, getting them talking and giving them a good, nutritious meal.'*

This leads to an exploration of the extent to which Big Local is **making a difference to individuals**. The Big Local outcomes are primarily focussed on the whole community. However, it is individuals that make up communities. The here is evidence that opportunities provided by Big Local partnerships to develop skills and knowledge has built confidence and assisted people into jobs, self-employment and (with UnLtd support) into social enterprise development:

*'I'm proud to get involved and promote the area... [When I moved here] no-one spoke. Now everyone talks and says hello as they know me from [Big Local] events and the newsletter..... Mentally [by being on the Board] I'm in a better place and it distracts me from my health issues.... Learning presentation skills was a step forward and brought back things I'd done in the past.'* (Partnership member)

These themes are reflected in Snapshots 12 and 13 about residents in two Big Local areas, Cheryl and Jake.

#### **Snapshot 12: Change for individual residents - Cheryl's story**

*'Two years ago I had two small children, five and four. I started going to the children's centre to interact more with other mums. We're on benefits 'cause I've given up work to have my children. which wasn't a very good lifestyle. Now I've been given the funding [Cheryl is an UnLtd Star Person] it's just changed my life and given me the opportunity to go self employed and build my own business and provide a better life for me and my family.*

*The idea behind my star people's was just to get other mums in the community who were like me, who didn't really interact in the community. .... out of the houses and interacting with each other. I'm a lot more confident now. I've got goals to look forward to now which I didn't have before. It's just given a brighter outlook on life for me and my family.*

*There's been a lot of difficulties, it took quite a while for my funding to come through. ... but ... I knew it's what I wanted to do. I wanted to do something in Barrowcliff that would make Barrowcliff better so I wasn't going to give up on that. (My children) wanting to get involved and do stuff now as well .... It's brought them more out their shells as well so which is really good.'*

A film of the full interview with Cheryl is available [here](#). Cheryl has since moved off the estate to find a larger home – but retains her connections with Barrowcliff, and has established her own business.

Cheryl's story may not be representative of the journeys of all residents who become involved in Big Local partnerships and other local voluntary action – but it is not atypical (see also Jake's story in Snapshot 13).

#### **Snapshot 13: Moving to self employment– Jake's story.**

Jake is a white man in his 40s. He and his family have lived in the neighbourhood all their lives. Jake has a background in information technology. He became disillusioned working for a large corporation and subsequently spent several years either unemployed or working on short term contracts.

Jake has been involved with his Big Local for just over a year, having engaged with Board members and the Big Local worker at a public event. Jake described the impact that involvement has had on his life:

*'I used to be a computer trainer and felt knocked about. I was festering. Now I'm more involved and have a better quality of life. It's given me a fresh outlook on life and brought me out of a pit.... I never used to be a community type person. Now I'm getting involved and it's improved my life.'*

Big Local also encouraged Jake to develop his ideas for self-employment:

*'I came up with the idea of this computer business [recycling and repairs] and they said we'll help you if you can help us. They offered me a space, a platform to advertise to the local community at events.'*

In Bountagu, a number of residents have used their experience of volunteering with Big Local to move into jobs or further training (See Snapshot 14), whilst in North Northfleet, CAS Training Solutions (see also Snapshot 18) reported that it had worked with almost 700 local residents in its first two years and that 29% of these had moved into some form of employment.

#### **Snapshot 14: Bountagu - From volunteering to paid employment**

Bountagu Big Local has used volunteering opportunities as a way of getting local residents 'job ready' and into work. For example:

- T gained a job in Community Development at the Council after being involved in the Parents Engagement Partnership and Bountagu Partnership
- L volunteered with the Bountagu Hang Out after school club and gained work in a school
- M gained work doing transport and decorating services after doing odd volunteer jobs at the Hub
- B gained work as an outreach worker with the Youth Engagement Project (police) after being involved with Bountagu community development projects
- W gained work at Bountagu as a cleaner.
- Others have moved into work with children and young people, in support work with older people or setting up their own catering businesses.

Examples from other areas that have prioritised routes into employment include:

- [Lawrence Weston](#) offers, in partnership with Bristol Energy Co-operative, paid internships – developing the website for local green and energy efficiency projects
- Barrowcliff has supported three Site Safety Certificate courses for almost 100 residents. All have gained the qualification and it was reported that a number had moved into work in the construction industry
- Hanwell is developing a horticultural apprenticeship scheme with a view to supporting apprentices into longer term employment in this field
- Whitley Bay, where Jam Jar Cinema has worked with the local high school to pilot Arts Awards for young people which can contribute up to 35 UCAS points towards University entry.
- [Birchfield](#) and [North Northfleet](#), working with UnLtd, have focused on developing social enterprises, led by local people and responding to local needs – including training for the long term unemployed and ex-offenders through to play and support services for isolated families with disabled children



## Learning in relation to this outcome

The key learning is that making a difference for individuals, groups and communities takes time. This is not a new, or revelatory, finding. It is, however, one that is worth re-stating at a time where the policy emphasis (for example in mental health and access to employment interventions) is on time-limited, brief, interventions. Each snapshot illustrates how the individuals and groups involved valued:

- the more open ended commitment of Big Local and delivery partners
- tailored support rather than 'one size fits all'
- being respected and not being judged.

Further, whilst as noted, partnership members often struggled to articulate the different Big Local outcomes as discreet entities, where areas have talked about making a difference, this has often been grounded in responding to real, rather than assumed, identified needs in the community. Grassland Hasmoor Big Local illustrated this and the time it had taken to reach their '*most fruitful year*' at a [partnership discussion](#) in 2016. It has also applied to outcomes where areas have some control over the desired outcomes – rather than control being located elsewhere. This has applied, in particular, to planning permissions or substantial external developments (e.g. Ebbsfleet Garden City) over which a Big Local may have no influence.

## 2.5 People feel that their area is an even better place to live

### Approaches to meeting this outcome

Big Local partnerships are acutely aware of their role in bringing about positive change in their communities. There is evidence (as above) that illustrate some differences beginning to be made. The extent to which this creates an 'even better place to live' in the longer term remains the subject of the longitudinal evaluation. However, there are immediate proxy indicators that illustrate that many of the 15 Big Local areas are on their way to achieving this outcome, with the proviso that perceptions of a better place to live are based on complex factors; the personal lives and wellbeing of individuals, people's relatively high or low expectations (see Section 4.4) as well as the broader socio-economic context of the various communities.

With ongoing austerity measures, part of their role has, in some ways, become one of ensuring things, at least, do not get worse. A key area here has been play and youth provision which, nationally, has been cut across the board (see National Youth Agency's [cuts monitor](#)). Big Local areas have, often in the face of pressure from within the community (or simply a feeling within the partnership that something needs to be done), picked up and funded play schemes and out of school provision. In other words, some Big Local activities have been more about trying to stop things getting worse, rather than making the place 'even better'.

In addition, in Birchfield there have been concerns that, as the area is seen as receiving Big Local funding, the local authority is withdrawing some services to concentrate on other areas of deprivation. Indeed, Birchfield is one example of where there are 'hard negotiations' between Big Local and the authority around responsibilities. To address this, the Big Local is an active member of the inter-agency environment group – and constantly arguing that, whilst local residents may



organise local litter picks and improve the environment through garden improvements and entering Britain in Bloom competitions – the local authority retains a statutory responsibility for tackling fly tipping.

The above points highlight the difficult economic climate Big Local as an initiative has evolved in – with ongoing austerity measures. Within that context, the following paragraphs (and Section 5) summarise the progress made in the 15 Our Bigger Story areas, in making their communities a better place to live – and the challenges they face.

### **Progress towards this outcome**

An even better place to live is a particularly ambitious outcome. It is one that can be difficult to prove a causal link between Big Local activities and broader change in the community. What is being built in areas is a collective narrative of how the community is changing – either in terms of the soft outcomes of people’s perceptions of their community – or in the ‘hard’ evidence of environmental and related physical improvements

In terms of the former, one vulnerable resident commented on the presence of a community hub, *‘This place has changed my life’*. In Whitley Bay, people talk about how they are *‘starting to see change happen’*, and how Big Local can be a seed that has lasting impact, that Big Local can impact on the atmosphere and the economy. Put simply – people see things happening. This is down to new activities supported by Big Local but also due to the role it has played in linking people into existing local projects and its mediation and co-ordination role across agencies. Reflecting on comments that the Big Local partnership could be seen as just another funding organisation (and in rural communities such as Radstock and Three Parishes a substantial one at that), there is evidence to counter this. Even where the Big Local has ‘recreated’ a funding stream previously supported by the local authority such as small grants programmes, or picked up a gap in a local service (e.g. Ramsey Million youth provision) the way in which these activities are determined, and the way they are delivered, differs. For example, whereas local authorities used to distribute community chest style small grants, the process in Three Parishes and Radstock is now linked to development support for grass roots groups. In Ramsey, Big Local has ensured a range of follow on activities from toddler age to late teens that are run and supported by residents so that there is greater ownership of the activities and more resident direction in the way the projects are managed. Parents and children alike are proud of Ramsey Million’s children and youth projects: *Toddler Time*, *Crunch*, *BOSH*. At its best, the local roots of Big local mean that areas can have, or aspire to have, specifically relevant and appropriate projects which are tailored to the needs of the local community:

*‘It’s about working with people and their ideas and having a go and not worrying about it....(Big Local) enables people to have their dreams and getting them going.’* (Partnership member)

For many Big Local partnerships, this may still be more an aspiration than a reality, but it is a goal they strive for. As noted, distinguishing between the four Big Local outcomes has been problematic with activities seen to relate to at least one outcome. For many Big Local partnerships, this last outcome is the culmination of achieving against the first three.

In this section, we have largely focussed on activities and projects, and highlighted where progress is being made. The evaluation also identified where a community development approach has been adopted to help build connections within and across communities – the ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ of social capital theory. Some Big Local areas such as Whitley Bay, have also focussed on the third ‘linking’ dimension of social capital through *‘turning round the communities relationship with the Council’* (Partnership member). The evidence that this is happening was the Our Bigger Story thematic workshop in Whitley Bay in August 2016 where council staff listened and participated alongside residents, and spoke of the change they were seeing. Snapshot 15 provides a perspective on how Whitley Bay is supporting the creation of social capital.

#### **Snapshot 15: A catalyst for connections and community activity in Whitley Bay**

Through Big Local, people in Whitley Bay are better connected and taking part in activities together. People with different interests have connected through Big Local, sometimes catalysed by Big Local funding which has helped to make things happen, but also just by being there; *‘we wouldn’t have had the conversations if Big Local hadn’t been here’*. People who got involved in one thing, have made connections with others – Big Local has enabled people to make more of what they have got, helping each other to unlock resources.

Residents and agencies say people are talking together in a much more constructive way. This includes turning round the community’s relationship with the council; *‘Big Local gives residents a voice’*, and communication at strategic level is greatly improved. The effect Big Local can have is summed up in Debbie’s story.

*‘I have lived in Whitley Bay for 22 years ....My only connection to the local community in those early years was when my children were at school ....*

*Though living in Whitley Bay, I worked in the city of Newcastle. Whilst volunteering ....two years ago, randomly, I was put in a small group with another local Whitley Bay resident .... She told me about a local community ukulele group in Whitley Bay [this group got going with Big Local support]. It took another year for me to free up the time and gain the confidence to attend my first Bay Uke session in September last year. I have been attending weekly sessions ever since and have played with the group at the Big Local, the Whitley Bay Carnival, Rosemount Residential Home and most recently at the Greenbean Market. Finding this community group has genuinely been a life changer for me! The music and social aspect of this group has made a very significant and positive contribution to my physical and mental health whilst also renewing my interest in my local community.’*

*I believe that the Big Local to a very large extent, has been a significant catalyst for change in Whitley Bay and has sown a large number of seeds. Quite literally. Until playing at the Greenbean Market, I had no idea that there was such a magnificent garden at the station. I had heard of the station masters garden but had no idea how established and delightful it was. I am so looking forward to retiring and spending some volunteer time in this garden and having the time to be an advocate for the benefits of taking part and connecting to community activities.’ (Resident)*

## Learning in relation to this outcome

All 15 areas involved with Our Bigger Story are at different stages in their Big Local journey. Barrowcliff and Growing Together have spent over half their 'million' whilst Blackpool Revue, on the other hand, only started to deliver services against its plan (agreed in December 2015) over the summer of 2016.

As stated, achieving outcomes for some is a long term goal rather than a series of 'quick fixes'. In addition, measuring progress towards outcomes is difficult, and something that Big Local areas themselves struggle to evidence. Some changes are seen by Big Local as particularly difficult to quantify;

*'You can't measure those things, but a lot of those things are happening or, you know, it's something as simple as somebody'll see you somewhere else and they'll smile and you didn't used to get that before, you can feel physically the difference.'* (Partnership member)

As Big Local partnerships start to see their budget coming to end however, partnership members are more keen to know how well they have performed so far. The Growing Together partnership is a case in point. It has produced a short report on its progress to date, including a commentary on the challenges of measuring and attributing impact (see Snapshot 16):

### **Snapshot 16; Growing Together: The challenges of measuring impact**

From: Growing Together: Programme Impact Assessment; August 2013 to March 2016

*Based on extensive consultation (approximately 600 interviewees) and conducted between November 2012 and April 2013, the Growing Together Community Partnership set the following very broad priorities:*

- *making the place feel safer, especially by tackling anti-social behaviour and criminal damage to cars, houses and the environment*
- *providing more opportunities and things for children and teenagers, so that they can make the best of themselves*
- *improving the local environment and encouraging local people to look after it*
- *adding to the quality of life for the older members of our communities.*

*The deliberate intention was to ensure that the largest possible number of people living on our five estates would feel at least some benefit. This wide spread has, of course, meant a thinner layer of jam. It should be noted that in a major community consultation exercise during the summer of 2015, all but two of 164 interviewees thought we'd got these priorities right.....*

### **Outputs achieved**

*Measured purely by its total outputs, the cumulative impact of the Growing Together programme over the period under consideration was impressive.*

| <b>Output</b>  | <b>Total achieved</b> |
|--|-----------------------|
| <i>People involved (NB users of more than one project counted for each project separately)</i> | 4,553                 |

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Hours of community activity                  | 1,600 |
| Physical and community enhancements          | 35    |
| Organisations and community groups supported | 28    |

*All this, of course, begs the question, “so what?” What real difference to the communities of the five estates, and individuals in those communities, did all this activity actually make? The rest of this report is an attempt to answer that question...*

### **Outcomes**

*The summary of projects and outputs in the previous sections paints a picture of considerable activity linked to the agreed priorities. But what difference has it actually made to people’s lives in the area?*

*Sometimes it is possible to measure outcomes in a precise and quantifiable way. An employment training programme might measure the numbers of people completing its course that then go on to secure a job for which the training now qualifies them. A crime prevention programme might measure the fall in crimes of a specific category, or the fall in re-offending levels.*

*Very few of Growing Together’s activities lend themselves to this sort of quantitative outcome measurement. End results will often only be seen in many years’ time. Even when outcomes can be measured there are often a host of other factors in play. Could a fall in anti-social behaviour rates, for instance, be attributable to the activities of a youth programme when work by schools, policing methods and alternative activities elsewhere might all have an influence. This report, therefore, makes considerable use of the professional opinions of people working in the area and of case studies to build up a picture of the impact achieved.*

As this section demonstrates, Big Local areas (even those in the relatively early stages of evolution), are making some progress against the four Big Local outcomes. As areas develop a track record of delivery, the significance of a vision becomes more apparent in knowing what will indicate success in the long term. This is helped, particularly, in those areas where current plans and activities are clearly related to a longer term vision for the community (e.g. Lawrence Weston - see Snapshot 17).

### **Snapshot 17: An even better place to live: a long-term strategic vision**

Since the plan for Lawrence Weston was agreed in January 2014, Lawrence Weston Big Local, working closely with its Locally Trusted Organisation (Ambition Lawrence Weston) has delivered a range of, often relatively small scale, improvements on the estate. These have included improving static play equipment areas, supporting the community café at the local Baptist Church ([Café on the Cross](#)), developing employment support and opening a community shop where residents sell arts, crafts and other goods.

This, however, is only part of their longer term, strategic vision, for making Lawrence Weston and even better place to live. That strategic vision has two key elements

**Lawrence Weston as a greener place to live:** with the Big Local investing, with Bristol Energy Co-operative in:

- energy audits on the estate with a view to encouraging residents to take energy efficiency measures

- wind turbines and, more recently, a solar farm (built on a brownfield site between Lawrence Weston and the M5 motorway). This, it is anticipated will deliver not only greener energy for the estate but also bring a £25,000 return on that investment for the benefit of Lawrence Weston

**New mixed development:** using the large area of derelict land in the middle of the estate (left by the demolition of the further education college) there are plans for a new supermarket, new homes (including some community led housing) and a community hub which would also accommodate the GP surgery and other local services.

Towards these goals, Lawrence Weston has worked closely not only with Bristol City Council but the neighbouring authorities of South Gloucestershire and North Somerset to successfully attract Coastal Communities Fund monies and stimulate other, private, investment in the area (such as the supermarket).

The progress made in Lawrence Weston can be viewed in two films made in 2015 and [‘Projects for Change’](#) in late [2016](#).

That progress is, however, uneven. The pace of change (as has been noted across all 15 areas) is often slower than anticipated or hoped for. Some areas, after initial development, have slowed down – or been slowed down (for example with difficulties in planning processes) or are struggling to influence events and situations which they feel are beyond their direct control. The learning from the progress made to date and the challenges faced by Big Local areas in realising their plans and visions, are addressed in Section 4.

## Section 3

### How Big Local works

#### Overview

This section offers:

- An overview of the aims of the Big Local programme.
- A summary of the Big Local 'light touch' approach.
- Who is involved in Big Local at the community level.
- How Big Local areas are delivering in their communities.

#### Summary

This section, and accompanying [Diary Lines film](#), describes the Big Local approach and how this is working. The challenges of that approach, and the learning involved are addressed in Sections 4 and 5 of this report.

All 15 areas involved in Our Bigger Story are at different stages of development. This ranges from those who became operational in 2016 through to those that have been delivering against their plan for just over three years. All are very different in that they are:

- addressing different issues
- operating in very different local contexts
- taking different approaches to delivery.

They do, however, share certain common characteristics. Each area has established Big Local partnerships in which the majority of members are local residents. Most have adopted fairly traditional models of governance with formal meetings and committee/sub-committee structures. All have now appointed workers to support the work of the partnership. All, to varying degrees, also report challenges in engaging residents with the formal partnership arrangements. Further, once operational, partnership members note the complexities of managing the Big Local programme. In some cases, developing fully functioning governance arrangements and making the transition from vision to delivery has been slower than anticipated. Balancing residents' management of the strategic direction of Big Local and becoming involved in the oversight of day to day delivery issues is also challenging. Many partnerships have been found to be risk averse (both in their governance and spending). This, however, reflects the level of accountability to the community partnership members feel around managing Big Local funds.

Partnership members are passionate about their involvement in Big Local and their community. This is reflected in the substantial amounts of time they commit to partnership activity – as well as other voluntary action in their community. That passion can, however, result in tensions and conflict between residents. Equally, partnership relationships with external bodies, in particular local authorities, vary. There are those that have developed close partnership arrangements (Whitley Bay), others where contact is very limited or can be, where local authorities (in the view of partners) do not understand the resident led ethos of Big Local, fraught with difficulty.

Big Local, as a 'light touch' programme, supports partnerships through:

- Locally Trusted Organisations (LTOs) which are charged with taking on the routine management tasks (e.g. employing workers/overseeing finances). There are those LTO's that are pro-active in their relationship with partnerships. In other cases, however, the relationship has been problematic – either in terms of LTO's delivering

what partners expect or because those organisations are, themselves, financially fragile.

- Each area has a Big Local rep. Their role has changed as Big Local areas have become operational. In the early development stage this was supporting partnerships in community engagement, profiling and plan development. Increasingly they act as a sounding board for partnership ideas and delivery and are a source of expert, objective, advice and sign-posting. As with LTO's, reps can play a very active role in the workings of the partnership or adopt a more 'hands off' approach unless there are particular problems.
- As noted, all areas involved in Our Bigger Story now have workers. Their role varies. There are those who play a largely administrative role, those who undertake community and organisational development tasks or manage communications whilst others undertake the oversight of delivery. Partnerships reported that workers could be a valuable resource, freeing up time for partnerships from routine tasks and co-ordinating activity.

Local Trust provides overall programme oversight and has, over time, refined guidance to Big Local areas and stream-lined reporting requirements in ways which areas have both found helpful – whilst others have felt that they could benefit from a clearer 'steer' from Local Trust. What partnerships do value (where they take advantage of these), are networking and peer learning opportunities co-ordinated by Local Trust. These events helped local residents see 'a bigger picture' beyond their immediate locality.

### 3.1 Local Trust and Big Local

Local Trust employs a staff team of 14 and works with national delivery and research partners e.g. Renaisi, UnLtd, Northern College, who bring additional expertise to deliver the Big Local programme. At ground level, Local Trust contracts with 56 reps – local advisors who provide 'light touch' support to the Big local areas and act as the interface with the national programme. Typically, a rep has 12 days a year to carry out this role with each area they are supporting.

At the heart of Big Local is the value of 'resident-led' development. The ethos of Big Local is summarised in Table 1.



**Table 1: The Big Local Programme**

The Local Trust Big Local website states:

*'Big Local is an exciting opportunity for residents in 150 areas around England to use at least £1m each to make a massive and lasting positive difference to their communities. Big Local brings together all the local talent, ambitions, skills and energy from individuals, groups and organisations who want to make their area an even better place to live.'*

*Big Local is funded by the Big Lottery Fund and managed by Local Trust.*

*Big Local outcomes:*

1. *Communities will be better able to identify local needs and take action in response to them.*
2. *People will have increased skills and confidence, so that they continue to identify and respond to needs in the future.*
3. *The community will make a difference to the needs it prioritises.*
4. *People will feel that their area is an even better place to live.'*

<http://localtrust.org.uk/get-involved/about-big-local>

In Big Local, residents decide upon any changes that they feel need to happen, design how change will take place, and determine appropriate timeframes for affecting change. In this section, we explore what 'resident-led' means in practice in Big Local areas and examine the varying structures and processes that have emerged in the spirit of resident-led development.

## 3.2 The Big Local partnerships

The work in each area is overseen by a Big Local partnership. This is the decision making body with responsibility for designing activities to achieve agreed outcomes. Local Trust prescribes that membership of Big Local partnerships must comprise at least 51% residents. In reality, most of the 15 areas that are contributing to Our Bigger Story have a higher percentage of residents on their partnerships. In the 15 areas studied, there was a mean average of approximately 13 members per partnership, of which nine were residents (69%) and four were non-residents. See Tables 2-5 for profile information.

**Table 2: Profile of membership of Big Local partnerships involved in Our Bigger Story (at November 2016)**

| Area              | Partnership total | Residents/non residents | Voting rights | Note on voting permissions                |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|---------------|---|
| Barrowcliff *     | 17                | 11/6                    | 17            | All organisation reps can vote            |
| Birchfield *      | 14                | 9/5                     | 12            | Paid worker and LTO cannot vote           |
| Blackpool Revue * | 10                | 6/4                     | 7             | School rep can vote but not other workers |
| Bountagu *        | 18                | 13/5                    | 17            | LTO cannot vote, some non residents can   |
| Catton Grove **   | 9                 | 7/2                     | 9             | All can vote                              |

| Area                    | Partnership total | Residents/non residents     | Voting rights | Note on voting permissions   |
|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|--|
| Grassland Hasmoor *     | 16                | 11/5                        | 13            | 4 non voters: LTO, independent chair and advisors                    |
| Growing Together *      | 16                | 13/3                        | 14            | One resident who has moved still has voting rights                   |
| Hanwell *               | 13                | 8/5                         | 8             | Only residents can vote  |
| Lawrence Weston *       | 18                | 10/8                        | 14            | Big Local workers and LTO cannot vote, but some agencies have a vote |
| North Northfleet *      | 12                | 7/5                         | 11            | Big Local paid worker does not have a vote, agencies have a vote     |
| Radstock and Westfield* | 9                 | 7/2                         | 7             | LTO rep (resident) has a vote but not Big Local workers              |
| Ramsey Million *        | 11                | 9/2                         | 8             | One resident has paid role and cannot vote                           |
| Three Parishes *        | 11                | 10/1                        | 11            | All can vote, including LTO  |
| Westfield *             | 13                | 11/2                        | 12            | 1 non resident local business owner can vote, advisor cannot vote    |
| Whitley Bay **          | 14                | 8/4 plus councillor and LTO | 12            | Councillor and LTO cannot vote, some non residents can vote          |

\* Information source is Local Trust Partnership Review

\*\* Information source is the Big Local area

**Table 3: Age range of partnership members across the 15 case studies (where specified)**

| Under 25 | 25-44 | 45-64 | 65 and over |
|----------|-------|-------|-------------|
| 1        | 162   | 85    | 49          |

**Table 4: Gender make up of partnerships across the 15 case studies (where specified)**

| Female | Male |
|--------|------|
| 124    | 73   |

**Table 5: Ethnic identity of partnerships across the 15 case studies (where specified)**

| White | Asian / Asian British | Black/African/Caribbean /Black British | Other |
|-------|-----------------------|--|-------|
| 166   | 11                    | 18                                     | 5     |

(Source: Local Trust Partnership Review 2016)

The profile of partnership members does reflect a broader picture of volunteers and community activists ([Office for National Statistics 2013](#)) in that the majority are women and White. Interestingly, however, the age profile is younger than the norm.

These figures in Table 3 illustrate the different ‘rules’ that partnerships apply to membership and voting rights. Some allow non-residents to vote, some allow some organisational representatives to vote, some allow the LTO to vote – others don’t. In addition, defining who is and is not a ‘resident’ can be complicated by the different ‘hats’ people wear. For example, residents may be employed or contracted to work on behalf of the Big Local group and thereby forfeit their place as a resident decision maker, or they may have other local roles such as elected members (in two areas, partnership members have been elected whilst on the partnership), business people or workers in other locally based organisations. Some of the case study areas have struggled with this issue of partnership members wearing multiple hats – of residents who may also be workers, elected members or volunteers with other local community groups – and potential conflicts of interest:

*‘... issue here is conflict of interest as ... going to employ a partnership member ..... It’s so hard to get a balance. We want Big Local to offer opportunities to people within our area but the minute we employ someone we possibly lose an active enthusiastic member of the partnership. What is the answer?’ (Partnership member)*

In some areas, the partnership meetings are open to all residents, whether formal partnership members or not. For example, in Catton Grove and North Northfleet, residents may attend frequently though make it clear they do not want the responsibility of being a full partnership member. In others, such as Hanwell, Three Parishes, Growing Together and Birchfield, partnerships tend to be a fairly fixed group – frequently referred to formally as a ‘partnership board’.

*‘... would value any resident that came along to a meeting to give their input as much as possible. Otherwise it stops being community-led.’ (Partnership member)*

*‘That’s important, that we continue to be open, because we do not want to exclude anybody and I think everyone should be welcome to come.’ (Partnership member)*

Non-residents sitting round the partnership table tend to have a history within the area but may live outside the boundary: people brought in (for example, agency representatives such as council members and officers, or supportive individuals) because they bring particular skills and expertise that can benefit Big Local. In addition, the LTO, which provides local accountable body function, is often present as is the Big local rep. All Big Local areas have at least one paid worker who is often also present and play a number of roles: supporting the chair, facilitating the plan review process, providing the administrative, monitoring or co-ordination of partnership meetings and delivery partners.

Those around the table at partnership meetings reflects:

- the history of community activity locally and relationships with key agencies such as the local authority,
- local authorities and local agencies willingness to engage with the spirit of Big Local, *‘I sometimes think that the county thinks of us as the back of beyond and they forget we exist.’ (Partnership member)*

contrasted with:

*'[We] have a commitment to the community ... it's in everybody's interest to see that change ... the benefits for the housing associations are obvious ... it's a no brainer for us [to be involved]....'* (Delivery partner)

- who was involved from the start and helped shape the Big Local 'profile' in the area,
- the extent to which past approaches to community involvement have been successful, and
- learning from slow or troubled starts and fallings out:

*'Has had its ups and downs with several attempts at a steering group and Partnership but settled down a bit now.'* (Partnership member)

Those involved with Our Bigger Story reflected on the different skills, knowledge and enthusiasm that partnerships may require in moving from initial consultation and engagement to 'programme management', and who is staying involved, in what is becoming a more technical, and in some cases, a more 'professionalised' process:

*'The challenge is connecting the creation of the plan and delivery through the management group....it takes time to develop what the plan actually means in delivery terms.'* (Big Local Worker)

This begins to raise issues about what resident-led means over time: the 'types' of residents that sit around the partnership table, the numbers of people making decisions, the accessibility, style and format of meetings, the scope of decision making by residents when their LTO and others such as paid workers are also at the table. The evaluation team has observed how easy it is for the more confident and articulate to speak up and hold sway – even if they do not have a formal decision making role.

Despite these questions, the resident-led ethos is valued – though time was required to build effective partnerships, especially where these involved building new sets of relationships:

*'Resident involvement, not just the council driving it. Big Local is a positive way for people to take ownership of where they live. ... people who hadn't worked together are now working together, people who couldn't sit in the same room are sitting together and people saying 'actually they are delivering.'* (Local Councillor)

*'I think we have delivered brilliantly – for a group of people who didn't know anything about anything.'* (Partnership member)

*'It is what it says, we are growing together.'* (Partnership member)

### **Who is involved and how does it work?**

Respondents have reflected on the challenges of:

*'.... taking people with you. Need to make strategic decisions but there are gaps in skills and understanding.'* (Partnership member)

Others have talked of the partnerships understanding different people's ability and 'moulding' things together to reach an informed consensus or agreement. Indeed, there is substantial evidence of active residents trying very hard to listen and understand in order to find a consensual way forward. There is also growing evidence of how residents are stepping up to the challenge and making increasingly complex decisions – around planning issues or asset management. Areas that started out only making small grants have moved on to larger scale agreements with delivery partners.

People have also talked about slowly grasping what Big Local is all about, that they are **seeing the bigger picture** and developing their confidence:

*'... more sure of themselves – the 'growing in them is significant'. These are people who have never been on a committee, can be difficult, but learning, and learning about how to think for themselves. This is their community and the first time they have been able to make decisions about it. Many talk about how they have learnt to listen to others, be patient, more thoughtful discussion.'* (Partnership member)

In a number of areas this has been a process of 'getting to a bigger picture', and in some remains a struggle. Often, individuals became involved to 'argue for their pet project' rather than seeing Big Local 'in the round'. In the first year of this evaluation there were many comments that reflected concerns about people and groups only looking 'to their own needs'. But as people have deepened their understanding of Big Local and become more experienced partners, this is changing in most areas:

*'Brought quite a diverse bunch of people together who probably would never have met under any other circumstances ... We've all got different views. We've all got our own pet projects probably ... everybody has maybe got a different agenda but we're all able to work things out and I think it's taught me quite a lot about other people and how to manage myself in an environment like this as much as anything else.'* (Partnership member)

*'I went to the meeting, I sat, I listened, I said more than my piece, I really gave it to [them], because I had got all the negatives that I was bought up with, .... and I know what people think, to a degree. So I was outpouring that, because nobody else was bothered, I thought it had to be said.... But I thought, when I went home, I thought I will give it a try, ... So I just kept going to the meetings, ... and then I was fortunate enough to be asked to join the interim steering group, and then following that, into the partnership. Although I have a lot of frustrations ... We keep plodding away, because unfortunately if (we) didn't, this wouldn't be happening.'* (Partnership member)

In the interests of inclusion and ensuring they have the 'right' skills, some partnerships have taken a broad view of what constitutes an eligible partner, and been open to partnership members who volunteer in the area or professionals (who may or may not live in the area), or who have particular skills and expertise. However, as resident members become more confident there are examples of where this is causing some underlying tensions.

*'I feel that precedence should be given to those who live here so that we can build a strong community.'* (Partnership member)

*'I have at times felt I was fighting to keep what the community have asked for at the centre of what we do whilst other board members are pulling in different directions, focus on their strong ideas and principles which may not be the same as the communities ideas and principles and going off on tangents with projects that the community have not identified as a need.'* (Partnership member)

**Working together** has been a particular challenge for those areas that did not identify the area marked by a Big Local boundary as one cohesive place. Initially people were arguing for their particular estate, village or parish, for example, Grassmoor or Hasland (rather than Grassmoor and Hasland), or Western Rhyn (rather than Three Parishes as a whole).

*'I've seen a lot of bad behaviour. On consideration though some of this has been caused by our lack of understanding of what was expected of us and how to go about it. The Big Local, with all good intentions, throw together all the enthusiastic volunteers from an area, who each have passion and commitment to what they are involved in, and expect them to work together for the betterment of the area but personalities and existing priorities get in the way.'* (Partnership member)

There is a real **passion** amongst those actively involved in Big Local, people with an emotional commitment to the locality. This is a strength of community driven development but it does bring its own challenges:

*'The difficulties come out of a positive. There are amazing people involved, very committed, and passionate and care about [names Big Local area]. The downside is that they all want to play a leading role and that has caused conflict.'*

*'Strong characters can draw others in, but also put off others...'* (Partnership members)

This emotional commitment and the sense of ownership that people develop, mean that any disagreement amongst partnership members can be taken very personally. This can have more lasting consequences when the differences of opinion are amongst friends and neighbours, as may well be the case in a small locality. Further, sustaining passion over a long term programme such as Big Local can be wearing. There is always a risk that people (and workers) burn out. Though not a new phenomenon, this applies to residents active in partnerships and multiple other activities – but also in instances where Big Local workers were also residents.

The commitment of those that have persevered through the ups and downs of personal and group development should be acknowledged, as should their determination to achieve the overarching long term goals of Big Local in the face of current difficulties:

*'... We bounce ideas off of each other and we try to get to a conclusion, and unfortunately the road to that conclusion is very bumpy I am afraid, and we veer off and go around it, or under it or over it, and try to get there.'* (Partnership member)

Alternatively, residents may have a **shared understanding** of what the key issues are in their community, but differ fundamentally on how to respond. For example, addressing drugs and alcohol use was identified as a core issue in Blackpool Revue (see Snapshot 1). Every area has prioritised children and young people but their responses and consequent activities are very different (see Table 7). This is in part dependent upon the local context and the type of service deemed to be specifically needed but often because they rely on the local configuration of existing approaches of service providers. For example, Growing Together was able to commission a film production educational project because it already existed rather than deciding they needed this specific type of project. Some areas have been more innovative than others. For example, Bountagu Big Local has supported young people to develop entrepreneurial skills, and changed its youth club approach in order to positively target a particular group of young people:

*'We did outreach, and we asked them why are you not coming? ...we thought we were doing a great job, and the place was empty. And they were thinking this is where all the wayward children go. So you have to be careful what you promote ...it was giving them a mixed message... we had beat boxing ... very flash ...the parents were actually scared to send their kids. So all the things that we were doing, although they were cool were kind of not quite meeting what people wanted.'* (Paid worker)

What partners talked about, however, was the ‘steep learning curve’ of moving from initial involvement to making those bigger, harder, decisions.

### Structure and procedure

The following paragraphs outline a number of the challenges that partnerships face, and some of the solutions that Big Local areas have identified.

#### Some challenges:

Big Local has always encouraged a creative and, to some extent, an informal process that allows anyone to participate, regardless of particular skills and knowledge. Yet, the majority of the areas involved in the evaluation have adopted traditional approaches to meetings, planning processes and community consultation.

Observing the use of such traditional meetings, one partnership chair noted:

*‘Partnership Board members do not really understand Big Local because they have not attended training events to find out about Big Local so they fall back on what they used to do and know. It’s a sort of charity model with the Board as Trustee’.*

A frequently expressed view, from Local Trust and reps – but also from partnerships themselves – is that, to ensure that they are **seen** to be accountable they have adopted very traditional forms of governance. Some people have talked about the fact that meetings can be tedious but assume it has to be this way to get things done. There are also those that have adopted local government type models – with executive and working groups. Others operate almost as the boards of charities with highly formalised proceedings. Indeed, most of the areas involved in Our Bigger Story used the term, partnership ‘board’.

Partnership procedures and responsibilities can be daunting: observations include residents spending inordinate amounts of time discussing the complexities of contracts and VAT, or getting to grips with incorporating as a formally constituted body:

*‘Meetings are boring – how long did it take to agree that bloody funding form? Too much legislation, terms of reference, etc.’* (Partnership member)

One person said that attending the partnership or one of its theme groups would be *‘intimidating if you weren’t a professional.’* (Partnership member)

Most people require support and encouragement to get and stay fully involved in any kind of group or organisation, and to keep up with understanding decisions that have been taken and their implications. One partner, for example, talked about resigning because *‘nobody is listening’*. Another complained that the partnership was *‘quite scary’* and in more than one area concerns have been raised about those making the decisions not being in touch with *‘the ‘real’ people’*:

*‘An expectation that anyone who comes on the board is a ‘mover and shaker’, rather than just man on the street.’* (Partnership member)

In addition several partnerships talked about how it can be difficult for new members coming into already established structures and relationships:

*‘Hard bringing new people in because they feel there is a group that know what they are doing, and where do they fit within it?’* (Partnership member)



In some areas, people note a disconnect between those on the partnership and those running and/or involved in activities:

*'It's not joining together – you have volunteers...doing things..., and then you have the partnership board and they are not matching up.'* (Paid worker)

Observations in 13 Big Local areas, reinforce this. For example, partnerships may comprise a fairly narrow age range amongst members, or a majority ethnicity, which is not reflected in those taking part in local activities and events. Some partnerships recognise this and discuss how they might change the composition of the strategic body others, however, seem unaware of these issues.

### **Some solutions:**

A number of partnership chairs stressed that to be a group, the partnership needs a social function ('time to chat and gossip') and have fun, as well as a focus on tasks. Bountagu, has organised some of its meetings over a meal in a local restaurant. In Ramsey Million, new people are encouraged to start with a project so that they understand 'their' bit of the whole first. Barrowcliff, Lawrence Weston and Northfleet all hold 'get togethers' as an informal 'way-in' for people new to Big Local:

*'Fortnightly Monday morning club in the café: It keeps residents involved in an informal way – people who may not want to participate in formal meetings.'* (Paid worker)

Most, but not all, Big Local partnerships have working, thematic or sub-groups. These can be effective and draw on the specific skills and enthusiasms of residents who may not, for whatever reason, want to be formally on the partnership (for example the Green and Open Spaces Group in Grassmoor Hasland Big Local). There is always the danger that this can result in a silo approach to delivery where individual Big Local themes or work programmes can operate in isolation and do not build to 'a bigger picture.' Many Big Local areas recognise this and measures are being put in place to ensure there is a more 'joined up' and strategic approach through the plan review process (for example, in Hanwell). In discussions with partnerships, several have commented that their approach to successful sub groups / working groups is to avoid them becoming 'cliquey' where they provide a voice for one or two people, or are unduly influenced by agencies which have an input on working groups, but not the partnership as a whole. All these issues and ways of mitigating them have been the subject of Big Local networking events. A simple checklist identifying familiar challenges with different approaches to meeting them from across the 150 areas could stimulate new thinking. There are, for example, some working methods that might seem radical to some Big Locals but would at least create healthy discussion, such as the rotating chair model, consensual decision making, and a community get together just a few times a year instead of a regular partnership meeting. Creating the conditions for community leadership is a theme returned to in Section 4.

*'The management group makes all the decisions Not enough consultation.'*  
(Partnership member)

Working out how to make Big Local work best in a particular area is in part the result of trial and error. With positive motives, many partnerships are responding to the increasing complexities of delivering plans by forming executive groups. These may be called project management, delivery groups etc. Those involved in these think they are vital to managing the workload, particularly in those areas with ambitious, multi-strand, plans. However, those not involved in these executive groups can be very critical, with people from more than one area commenting that partnership meetings have become a 'rubber stamping' exercise for decisions made elsewhere. In one area, some partners are unhappy about the way the project management group was set up and how people became members. They felt that there had not been any discussion and it had just 'appeared'. In

another area both partnership and non-partnership members talk about one or two people who want to control everything, including who gets on to the partnership. Conversely, discussion in one area about whether to form an executive group and hold less frequent partnership meetings led to a collective response that everyone wanted to be centrally involved, to *'have their say and not have words put in their mouths'*. There is often a tension here between those who are, and can, put in a lot of time and others who feel left out; there are both those who feel they do everything and feel undervalued, and others who feel *'left out of the loop'* and undervalued.

Many of the tensions identified are becoming stronger as partnerships are responsible for more and more plan delivery. What is, however, evident from the data on partnership working, structures and processes is that residents are reflecting on the key issues of power, influence, equity and control in decision making and engagement with the wider community. This will be important to pick up as the longitudinal evaluation progresses.

### **Transparency and accountability**

Being open and transparent requires a conscious effort. As stated above, some partnerships, to be seen to be transparent, make it clear that meetings are open to anyone who wants to come along and encourage everyone to participate in discussions. For others, organising ostensibly social events (fete's, local carnivals etc.) also fulfils the purpose of the partnership being visible to the community and therefore more accountable.

Attempts to increase transparency and accountability often take the form of newsletters (see, for example, [North Northfleet](#)) and written reports, web-based news and publication of meeting minutes, occasional open days, consultation events and community wide forums. These seem to work best where there are paid staff to help co-ordinate things. Sometimes the only people who attend are those who are already a *'bit in the know'*. Partnerships regularly complain that more people do not turn up to events: or attendance does not translate into engagement with the partnership and decision making. They also grumble that people only come *'for a grumble'* and feel frustrated that their hard work, time and commitment is not acknowledged. Inevitably, active residents can become very defensive, particularly when they have previously experienced criticism.

### **Allocating funds**

Partnerships have expressed caution, both about governance structures and spend, and are only too aware that not only do they need to be accountable, but need to be **seen** to be so. They were, in their view, responsible for expenditure within their own community – rather than making decisions about funding for a community with which they were only remotely connected.

This is particularly the case where partnerships are trying to balance:

- encouraging new community activity whilst not introducing onerous application processes for funding,
- ensuring perceived equity of funding within different parts of Big Local areas (e.g. not being seen to favour one estate or village over another), and
- promoting innovation (for example, Ambition Lawrence Weston's plans for social investment in green energy production) whilst ensuring that funded initiatives actually demonstrate value for the community.

Various strategies have been adopted and continue to be revised and refined. In terms of small grants, areas such as Radstock have introduced public voting Dragon's Den-style events. Three

Parishes has developed a simple application process, with capacity building support and simple, standardised, progress and feedback systems. Whitley Bay Big Local has introduced Small Sparks awards of up to £250 and held a 'Soup' crowd funding event as a way of giving more grass roots access to funds. Growing Together has both a large projects proposal form and a small grants application form on its website and is clear where the decisions about funding will be made. Another example was the Ramsey 'project mandate form' that everyone who wanted to deliver a project had to fill in and could be used for evaluation purposes to ensure everything was open and above board.

In terms of larger, revenue, spends many have adopted a more detailed commissioning process, though a few (e.g. Blackpool Revue and Whitley Bay) have opted for open tendering so as not to be seen to favour particular agencies. Some in Whitley Bay Big Local have since acknowledged, however, that this can work against a desire to strengthen grass-roots organisations and damage relationships at the local level.

### 3.3 A light touch approach

From the start, the Big Local programme has espoused a 'light touch' approach. In the NCVO evaluation report, [Big Local: the early years](#), 2015 (p30) the core elements of this light touch approach are described as:

- minimal rules and regulations,
- support and guidance provided in an enabling way,
- simple systems and processes, and
- a learning culture.

The diversity of the partnerships' operating models is testimony to the fact that Local Trust and its national partners have encouraged Big Local areas to develop in ways that are meaningful to them and appropriate to their context (see Thumbnail sketches, Section 1). Some areas became operational quickly and have drawn down and used a large proportion of their £1 million (for example, Growing Together and Barrowcliff), others have only recently begun to deliver their plan and committed very little of their money so far (for example, Radstock and Revue). Some, in the early years, have taken a deliberately cautious approach:

*'In the first year ... I think we did the right thing, not putting too much pressure on ourselves, just really trying to make a foundation with the people that came forward. I think the next three years is really about really pushing to get more people involved.'* (Partnership member)

The acknowledgement that 'one size does not fit all' and enabling different approaches to be developed is a key feature of the Big Local programme. As noted, Big Local areas evolve at their own pace, draw down resources as and when needed (rather than on a pre-agreed schedule) and devise their own governance structures. It does mean, however, that as the programme develops over time and new processes are introduced (e.g. the plan refresh, the partnership review and the introduction of 'Social Investment Reps'), some participants feel that they are getting mixed messages and question whose money it is. Some residents talk about wanting more autonomy and others feel there could be more guidance:

*'They don't say, "Oh yeah, we've got a policy for that, there you go". They say, "Well, you put your policy together, you decide what you want to do".'* (Partnership member)

*'Could be clearer – are we autonomous or not?'* (Partnership member)

*'Supposed to be different but you've got to do everything the same.'* (Partnership member)

There are those who feel it would be easier for partnership consensus if there were clearer messages (i.e. *'you can do this, you can't do that'*). Some have said that a handbook would be useful so that everyone is clear, particularly with regard to the LTO. The areas that reported difficulties would like guidance around the LTO role and responsibilities and relationship with the Big Local partnership to be *'sharper'*, particularly in relation to what the 5% grant to LTOs for administration/management costs is actually meant to cover:

*'I think they (LTO) do sometimes struggle with their role and we do not always know what the boundaries are, so a little bit more guidance from the Local Trust HQ.... would be good.'*

(Partnership member)

### **Locally Trusted Organisations (LTOs)**

The concept of, and rationale for, LTOs is a proactive aim on the part of Local Trust to free up residents from the bookkeeping and paperwork that goes with managing and reporting on at least £1 million. It is intended to encourage residents who may not want to be part of an organisation to be involved, and help the partnerships stay outward and outcome-focused, as opposed to becoming inwardly concerned with bureaucracy and their own organisational survival. In addition, the LTO model recognises that there are local organisations with existing structures in place that can provide support, advice and expertise to residents without creating something completely new.

The nature of, and roles played by, LTOs vary substantially. Some act purely as financial managers with partnerships taking on the supervision of paid workers. Others are much more engaged as advisors and active participants in partnerships and, in some cases, the LTO is also a delivery partner. For a majority of groups involved in the evaluation, the LTO model works very well:

*'A good backstop for accountability, etc.'* (Partnership member)

*'LTO role of managing money is good – would be more of a risk if local people were doing it. They bridge the gap with Local Trust.'* (LTO)

In some areas, the LTO is itself a small organisation and playing this role has helped its development, local connections and roots:

*'... The first time they employed workers was on behalf of [Big Local partnership] but a good relationship, all seems very smooth and strong personal relationships'.* (Partnership member)

*'We enable them to go out and do the work – we do the backroom stuff. Want this to continue ... a larger body as engine room and a group out there.'* (LTO)

In at least two of the study areas, there are suggestions from both the partnerships and the LTO that the locally-based LTO will be an appropriate legacy body for the activities and ways of working initiated by Big Locals.

Whilst the LTO model appears to work in most areas, it is not always a smooth relationship. A number of Big Local partnerships have changed their LTO. In one area this was because they felt their original LTO had the skills to manage community consultation but did not have the necessary capacity for financial and programme management. In at least one case the LTO is in a precarious

financial position. In other areas though, there have been some difficult relationships between the partnerships and their LTO:

*'Many do not understand the LTOs role, despite it being explained, and expect staff members to be at 'their' behest at the snap of 'their' fingers.'* (Partnership member)

There are currently at least three out of the 15 case study sites where the LTO has given notice. One respondent indicates that the LTO relationship has been disappointing and questions the model because it gives all the *'difficult stuff'* to someone else instead of building skills in the community, and creates dependency.

Other difficulties with LTOs were reported. These include, for example, LTO's not providing regular accounting updates to the partnership, not wanting to have much of a role, refusing to handle day-to-day expenses (or reimbursing staff/partners late). There are also examples of LTO's not wanting to employ Big Local staff, refusing to take on building leases or conversely, being too heavy handed and not understanding the ethos of residents running the programme. Instead of liberating residents from money matters, it can actually do the opposite – several partnerships have spent substantial amounts of time discussing a 'failing' relationship with their LTO, and in some instances, Big Local areas feel they are being pushed by the situation with their LTO into formalising their structure so as to become their own LTO.

#### **'Hands off' support**

In addition to greater clarity regarding the role of the LTO, some partnerships have also requested more understanding about the role of their **Big Local rep**.

The role of the reps changes as the partnerships work through the different stages of the programme (engagement, profiling, visioning, plan design, plan delivery) the Big Local pathway, the post-plan assignment stating:

*'Your role as a rep is to help the area achieve their vision for the Big Local area through support, advice and appropriate challenge. You will maintain an overview of Big Local as the 'eyes and ears' of Local Trust and ensure that the three-way relationship between the partnership, LTO and Local Trust is working as planned.'* (Rep)

In one area, the partnership noted how the role of the rep had changed – from being very pro-active in the plan development stage to being more of a responsive sounding board in the delivery stages.

Generally, the concept of the Big Local rep role is welcomed. Reps are described by Big Local partnerships as playing a mediating role, as an analyser, a summariser, and valued for their support around team-building and networking. On the other hand, the role of reps has also been questioned:

*'Rep as the arrow – keeping the Partnerships on track.'*  
(Paid worker)

*'Not sure what their role is or why they come; ... they observe but do not contribute much; .... do not tackle anything.'* (Paid worker)

For the reps themselves it can feel an isolated role, especially for those that do not have pre-existing relationships with other reps. Reps can be unclear about 'doing the right amount'. They have to manage and balance the expectations from Local Trust and its reps delivery partner Renaisi, with expectations from the partnerships. Sometimes reps find themselves picking up work which might be expected of the LTOs. In some areas, the rep is dedicating a substantial amount of time, and in others it appears to be very little. This, however, may be a fluctuating pattern depending on the strengths

and needs of the partnerships at different times. In one area, there was a feeling that the rep should help network and signpost more to the work of other Big Locals, and one partner in another area said they expected more direct advice and 'answers' from the rep:

*'They say they are playing Devil's Advocate, well.... I do not have time for that .....Just say 'yes or no', or 'another area does this.'* (Partnership member)

It may be that those partnerships that have had an opportunity to choose their rep have thought through their expectations more thoroughly than those who feel they have had no choice. Some areas have retained the rep they were allocated at the start of the programme, and in some parts of the country there is a much smaller pool of reps available. The lack of clarity regarding expectations can be further confused when there is paid worker support in place. For example, who does what when it comes to sorting out local conflicts or where there is a hands-on LTO? In other cases, reps provide a valuable support and mentoring role to the paid worker. This is not a discussion about 'good' and 'poor' reps. It is more a test of the clarity, and flexibility, around the role of the reps and how their styles of working and personalities have an impact on their relationships at the local level. Reps themselves have suggested (Our Bigger Story workshop with reps, 22 June 2016) that they may have been with an area for too long and become too comfortable, too close to the partnership and the delivery plan. They are concerned about creating 'dependency'.

### **Paid workers**

All Big Local areas in Our Bigger Story have chosen to have on the ground support through paid workers. The roles of those workers vary substantially: from primarily administrative tasks, to outreach, community development and project/programme management. As noted, light-touch guidance has enabled different approaches to evolve.

As the programme overall develops, more and more LTOs are employing workers on the Big Local's behalf. This is not a decision partnerships take lightly. On the one hand they were very aware of the responsibilities of engaging paid workers, suggesting that workers should only take on tasks for which it was seen as *'unreasonable'* to ask of volunteers (e.g. project over-sight/monitoring), or where particular skills and a large amount of time are required (e.g. community engagement). Further, Big Locals were very conscious of their responsibilities to support workers and pay reasonable wages: a responsibility that they balanced against a key consideration: payment of workers reduced the amount of money going directly to the community.

Workers are employed through a variety of models: secondment from the local authority, employed by the LTO or contracted on a self-employed basis. This diversity is matched by the different roles they play (e.g. co-ordinator, manager, community development worker, project workers, etc.) and by the numbers of paid staff, from one part time worker to one full time worker to several paid officers.

Some partnerships have been more ready to operate alongside paid staff than others. The relationship appears to work well where:

- the worker has been active in the area for some time
- there has been a paid worker in post from the early days, before the plan, as this has provided an opportunity for everyone to learn about Big Local together and let their respective roles emerge
- the worker is employed by an LTO with a strong history within the community
- the worker is also a local resident.

In some cases, partnerships have agonised over employing workers as this has been seen by some as reducing the available amount of money for direct community projects. Others have struggled with the issue of 'saving money' with workers operating on a self-employed basis versus the desire to be seen as a good employer offering fair terms and conditions of service. Where workers are employed, they are seen as playing a valuable role in, and bring different skills to, Big Local areas. Partners variously reported that paid staff:

- reduced the administrative burden on partners
- played a key developmental role in supporting and encouraging co-operation between local groups
- took on 'routine' tasks that freed up partnerships to be more strategic:  
*'Obviously I'm passionate about a lot of things, but it's P. [the worker] that does all of the leg work for us. .... [the worker] has pretty much taken a back seat in terms of decision making and stuff like that. A lot of the decisions that have been made, have been made by us as a group, and whenever we needed something done like door knocking done and things like that we then organise [the worker] to do that. So [the worker] was only acting on the actions that we wanted to carry out.'* (Partnership member)

On the whole, workers appear to understand the resident-led ethos of the programme and are keen to support and not to undermine decision-making by residents. It is inevitable however, that particularly where the worker is full time, they will build up relationships with other decision makers and power holders, interactions that residents may not have the opportunity to develop. This does raise questions about sustainable networks and influence in the future. There are also areas where residents let the workers 'get on with it' and can end up being passive recipients of the process<sup>2</sup>.

There have been difficulties in a few areas, most notably where the workers have not stayed beyond the first few months of their contract but also where partnership members feel they have not worked effectively with paid staff or not got the best from them. Although not the employer, there are responsibilities on the part of partnerships in terms of thinking through what they want the worker's role to be and understanding what this might entail as well as how, as volunteers, they work alongside paid staff. Learning from several areas indicates that:

- some partnership members never really saw the purpose of paid staff but went along with the majority
- the workers were not clear what was expected of them and were given very little induction into what Big Local is about, and/or did not do enough of their own research into how the programme operates
- residents were not involved enough in thinking through the job description
- the LTO did not quite understand Big Local and the worker's role
- there was a lack of clarity around the relationship between the worker's role and that of the rep.

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<sup>2</sup> Note: recognition of this potential tension between paid workers and volunteers in grassroots community organisations is not new; Alcock, P., Harrow, J., Macmillan, R., Vincent, J. and Pearson, S. (1999) *Making funding work: Funding regimes and local voluntary organisations*, York, York Publishing Services.



*'Had to go through it [employment of staff] to say 'do we really want this?' Not what the partners envisaged. Had to find out what they didn't need.'* (Partnership member)

Where the relationship breaks down it can be a traumatic experience for everyone concerned and learning about how to 'manage' the relationship productively would be useful for all Big Local areas. Equally, several workers have said they would like to network with others carrying out similar roles and build their learning about how to balance *'being left to get on with it'* with enabling residents to take the lead.

### 3.4 Opportunities to reflect and share learning

Local Trust offers a range of learning opportunities, and peer learning – sharing with and learning from other Big Local areas at networking events was particularly valued – as are chair's meetings for those who attend. These networking spaces were, for some, a key opportunity not only for disseminating information on 'what works' but offered a safe space for sharing problems, challenges and potential solutions. In one observed partnership meeting, Big Local, and Local Trust itself, were described as *'learning systems'*.

*'It's good to know we are not alone.'* (Partnership member)

For partnership members, learning was, predominantly, experiential: learning by doing. This was repeatedly discussed, across areas, in terms of the transition from visioning and plan development to delivery.

*'Learnt that working with people takes time.'* (Partnership member)

Partnership members repeatedly reported the development of new skills: from understanding planning application processes to assessing funding applications; from project development to monitoring and assessing delivery.

*'We are learning things as we go along. A really interesting experiment here.'* (Partnership member)

*'It's a learning curve for partners who haven't worked with other agencies and other businesses. It's learning to work with the businesses and understanding what we actually want from them, and what they can get from us as well, it's that two way thing that we are learning still.'* (Paid worker)

This applied to volunteers as well. For example, those in Birchfield valued the opportunity to gain advice, guidance and counselling qualifications through their involvement in 'Stepping Forward', the Big Local Job Club.

As well as technical knowledge, local residents particularly appreciated the opportunities that partnerships afforded in terms of 'soft' skills: gaining confidence and self-belief, and using skills they had 'in the home' to develop new groups (e.g. gardening activities and arts/crafts groups). Beginning to be inquisitive and raise questions was also an element of Big Local learning for local residents – though this could be a hard process:

*'That has come quite late to us in some ways. Over the last six months we have been really questioning things and it has burst the bubble a little bit on some ways.'* (Partnership member)

In terms of experiential learning, plan reviews offer partnership members an opportunity to reflect on what they have already learned and apply that knowledge to forward planning.

All Big Local areas are expected to review their progress and refresh their plans on a regular basis. This is taken very seriously (see for example, the film of [Ramsey's Plan Review](#) meeting) and often conducted in dedicated meetings which can be creatively facilitated, sometimes by a paid worker and sometimes by the Big Local rep. In Hanwell, the plan review process involved assessing delivery against core objectives and principles – in particularly equalities.

This is not a quick process however, and partnerships do struggle to make the time required.

*'Recognition that as a partnership have to manage it in a business-like and professional manner.'* (Partnership member)

Several partnerships have taken this opportunity to focus 'in' a bit more, acknowledging that their initial plans were very ambitious and that it is better to prioritise fewer things and make sure they are delivered:

*'.....it was felt that with hindsight the first Development Plan was too ambitious in terms of the number of schemes and projects included which has stretched limited capacity within the group. Despite overall satisfaction with the outcomes from the first plan, for future plans, members are minded to feature fewer schemes to focus on more effectively.'* (Barrowcliff Plan Review 2015 p19).

### Shared learning

Although some of the areas involved in Our Bigger Story are only just moving into the delivery phase, there are emerging, shared lessons on 'what works' in delivering Big Local plans – even though how those plans are being delivered varies considerably. These relate specifically to:

- **How the partnerships operate**

*'We had a really good turn out from community members in early meetings and felt we could deliver a lot of work from local volunteers who would stay in the community. As time went on many of the people who originally attended fell away and it was clear that we needed help and capacity to deliver our plans. However, I think what has been positive for us is not to have one worker who leads the whole project and has quite a bit of ownership but to keep the ownership with the BL board and to engage workers who have specific tasks.'*  
(Partnership member)

The NCVO Early Years Report indicated that up to 30 residents could be active in any one Big Local partnership. As areas have moved to delivery, those numbers have tended to decline to a smaller core group (see Table 3). As a result, some areas have struggled with fewer people (often also active in other community groups) feeling over-burdened: *'people give up, get exhausted and drop out.'*

By relying on traditional forms of meetings and decision making, residents can be put off attending. Factors which have helped partnerships address these issues have included:

- Mixing formal business meetings with social events.
- Being visible: the partnership 'being seen' at community events (or actually organising them) rather than assuming that residents will *'come to them.'*
- Making partnership meetings open events to ensure transparency.

- Working collaboratively with other key local stakeholders and organisations, so that the partnership is not trying to do or oversee everything - there are several examples in the current report where, rather than taking the lead on a particular initiative, partnerships have achieved their goal by brokering relationships (for example the transition of the local library to a community resource in the Three Parishes).
- Acknowledging the important social aspects of meetings that are not solely 'task focused': *'Let's not lose sight of it: Big Local should also be fun.'*
- Reducing the number of formal whole partnership meetings and working through sub-groups which attract residents to a particular issue they feel passionately about.
- Ensuring that there are wider circles of volunteers around the partnership; those that do not attend meetings but will take forward agreed actions and plans.
- Holding on to the long term vision – even when things get difficult.

Equally important has been the willingness (or otherwise) of partnerships to attract new members and transfer the skills and knowledge of established partnership members to them:

*'I suppose – I feel that we've been doing this for some time now and it's the same people who have been doing it, and I think we've been very successful, but I think we've reached a point now where we need new blood on the committee and we need new ideas and whatever we thought the area needed, we've moved on a little bit now. And we need young people and more people to come and start telling us what the area needs now, because things move quite quickly and ... – it's a different area than it was five years ago.'* (Partnership member)

- **Partnership/inter-agency working**

The way in which partnerships work with their local authority, and vice-versa can be critical. In the [Partnerships in Conversation \(Leeds\)](#), participants from Whitley Bay describe how they have invested time and energy in turning round the relationship between residents and the local authority – from one where officers and members came to community meetings expecting to be shouted at to one where a more collaborative approach has facilitated problem solving in a difficult financial climate for local government. Here, the Big Local has been engaged in the Seafront Regeneration Plan and, working with the Friends of Whitley Park: *'[involved] getting the park included in that [Seafront Regeneration Plan] meant that the Council came to see the park as an attraction, not a liability,'* (see [Whitley Bay workshop film](#)). In addition to working more closely with the council, Whitley Bay Big Local has also involved the police, the Chamber of Trade and a major transport provider in strategic conversations.

Hanwell Big Local also talked of the importance of regular meetings with the local authority being conducted within a framework of a shared problem solving rather than mutual blame. This was particularly the case in North Northfleet, where the local authority (or at least, sympathetic members and officers) had come to understand that Big Local was *'more than a pot of money'* and had a credibility with, and could be a positive voice for, the wider community.

Growing confidence within partnerships, and the ability to 'speak the same language' were also seen as key facilitators:

*'The Council thought they were dealing with people who didn't have a clue – but got a shock.'* (Partnership member)

In some, rural, areas building partnerships with local government in particular, has been problematic – not because of any inherent difficulties in relationships but because of the physical distance between them - remoteness of a large single rural unitary authority and the Big Local area. In other areas there has been what was described as – if not an openly hostile relationship – certainly one of distrust between local residents and local government. In still others, the difficulties related directly to budget cuts and, for example, the frustrations involved in substantial delays to planning permissions because of redundancies within the relevant Planning Department.

- **Communications**

Partnership members have frequently commented on the difficulties of conveying the Big Local message of being resident led 'upwards' to local policy makers and 'outwards' to the wider community. In a number of cases, understandings of the Big Local approach had not been helped by, often inaccurate, press coverage. This resulted in perceptions, locally, that the £1 million had been released by Local Trust in one tranche and was, put crudely, sitting in someone's bank account – so why was nothing apparently happening? Communication has, therefore, become a substantive issue across the areas participating in the evaluation.

Having a clear communications strategy has helped in this – combining face to face 'chance' meetings (*'Big Local throws together people that do not usually meet'* Partnership member), with regular events, up-to date websites, regular newsletters and a strong social media presence. In some instances, Big Local areas have contracted an external agency to manage communications (in the early days Somers Vale Community Radio undertook this role for Radstock) or, as in the case of Three Parishes, this is part of the responsibility of a worker. In others, the communications task has been 'delegated' to a specific partner or sub-group (Hanwell).

In terms of effectiveness, partnerships were clear that word of mouth (supplemented by social media activity) was crucial. Those interviewed were however, very aware that it was risky to assume that residents would come to meetings, attracted simply by publicity. They also commented on the dangers of partnerships being drawn into meetings 'behind closed doors' which, whilst important in the planning process, reduced Big Local's visibility. Large scale, open air, community events, whilst time consuming to plan, were an important factor in developing and maintaining community understanding of, if not active engagement in, Big Local.

Interestingly, however, communications strategies appeared to be most effective when the partnership was talking about what was happening in the community – rather than focusing on Big Local and the partnership itself. For more information on this see Local [Trust's Big Local online](#) report.

## Section 4

### Big Local as a lasting change agent

#### Overview

This section examines;

- how Big Local partnerships negotiate change
- Big Locals as a catalyst for change
- leadership and influencing others, in particular local authorities
- the expectations of, and on, Big Local partnerships
- the Big Local legacy.

#### Summary

This section, and the accompanying [themes film](#), addresses the five themes identified through the research with Big Local areas in 2015. In particular it examines the extent to which Big Local is a change mechanism both internally and externally, partnership approaches to developing community leadership and building influence, the expectations placed on partnerships, the influence they have locally and the concepts of sustainability and legacy.

The Big Local approach is underpinned by the concept that resident led action is a [catalyst for change](#) as well as a mechanism for [managing that change](#). As with progress against outcomes, the picture across the 15 areas is mixed, from the physical evidence of the difference Big Local can make, to long term plans for the physical transformation of parts of an estate. Partnerships also talk of the soft changes that are taking place: around how people feel and think about their community, and in areas predominantly using small grants, change is identified at a micro-level for individuals and small scale community activity. The extent to which Big Local partnerships act as a change agent may depend on a strong strategic vision with pertinent activities, large or small, along the way.

Big Local areas are, themselves, changing. In urban areas, new communities have continued to arrive since the inception of the programme. In rural areas, new housing development have resulted in in-comers who are then also out-commuters. Partnerships are aware of these changes, though often unsure of how to respond to them. Those which have been through a plan refresh exercise have tended not to radically alter their original plan on the assumption that it is still relatively early days and activities against plans need time to 'bed in'.

Big Local partnerships see the principle of resident led community development as important and talk of developing a collective [leadership](#) in terms of decision making. The realities are more complex. Residents constitute the majority on the partnerships in all 15 areas involved in the evaluation. However, they also wear other, sometimes multiple, hats: they both live and work as professional in the neighbourhood, some are also elected members or local authority officers as well as residents. In terms of decision making there is also a complex interaction between residents and workers/ reps – with instances where resident partners defer to the professionals in the room.

A common narrative from partnerships is that their community is a forgotten area. Some, have, however, been strategic in gaining **influence** by using Big Local money either for financial leverage and/or as a way to be taken seriously by the local authority and other external agencies. Some,

particularly rural, Big Locals feel they are too far away from where decisions really get made – or, the scale of other developments are on a level which makes it hard for them to influence.

Big Local partnerships express different views on the [expectations](#) placed on them and what they can reasonably achieve. For example, some partners are aware that ‘£1 million is a lot of money in a community like this’ whilst others comment that Big Local money amounted to ‘£10 for each resident a year – or £100 over the 10 years’ and caution against unrealistic expectations of what might be achieved in the current climate of austerity.

All the areas involved in Our Bigger Story are less than half way through their Big Local Journey. Issues of [legacy and sustainability](#) are, nonetheless, high on their agenda. Different strategies are being adopted. Some areas are exploring incorporation as a way of attracting future funds and managing community assets in the hope of becoming a sustainable organisation. For others, the legacy is physical and environmental improvements. Still others see their legacy as cultural: more people in the community having the confidence and skills to take action long into the future. Which approach leads to a lasting legacy – or a sustainable organisation (something not originally envisaged of the programme), will require careful evaluation in the coming years.

Section 2 of this report examined the extent to which Big Local areas are meeting the four programme outcomes identified by Local Trust. This section explores, through the 15 case studies, some of the local processes behind those outcomes, using five research themes identified at the end of the first year of the evaluation (February 2016), namely:

- Big Local areas capacity to *negotiate change*
- The extent to which Big Locals are a *catalyst for change*
- The development of community leadership and influence
- Dealing with *expectations* around what can be ‘achieved’
- Understanding about *sustainability and legacy*

## 4.1 Negotiating change

This theme looks at how Big Local partnerships negotiate change in their areas, and indeed, change themselves as the ten years unfold. It aims to help build understanding about how Big Local partnerships operate and address internal and broader community tensions, how needs are identified and how responses to needs are decided upon and enacted.

All 15 case study areas are different and, although there are some similarities and common themes, there is no neat typology of the areas. However, there is at least one shared underlying narrative which is that they are areas where people feel they have been forgotten, even in those that have had previous regeneration/neighbourhood renewal programmes such as Single Regeneration Budget<sup>3</sup> or European Social Fund<sup>4</sup>. Several areas talk about being far away from the local authority’s radar. The

<sup>3</sup> The Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) was set up in 1994 to bring together a variety of programmes and initiatives from several Government departments. The aim was to simplify the funding process and to provide resources to support regeneration initiatives carried out by local regeneration partnerships.

<sup>4</sup> The ESF is Europe’s main instrument for supporting jobs, helping people get better jobs and ensuring fairer job opportunities for all EU citizens. See <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/home.jsp>

following paragraphs explore how Big Local partnerships are negotiating ‘outward facing’ change in terms of a changing context, how they prioritise change, and how they negotiate ‘inward looking’ change i.e. internal partnership change and the risks associated with this.

- A changing context**

In some partnerships, there is high awareness of transience – people moving in and out (such as Bountagu, Birchfield and Blackpool) on a regular basis. In others, there is an expectation that the community will change as a result of new housing developments (e.g. Three Parishes and Radstock). Many Big Locals do recognise that there are multiple communities within their boundary, often because of roads dividing the area and different housing tenures across the area:

*‘Geographically it’s quite difficult because we have a main road running through two big social areas of housing and then at the southern end of it, we are in another almost into the city but it’s a different sort of community.’* (Partnership member)

*‘A changing community, with deprivation next door to affluence.’* (Partnership member)

Thus, negotiating change, is complex, both in terms of who decides what change would make the area ‘an even better to place to live’ and how change might impact differently across an area, especially where the demographic profile is diverse or changing at a fast pace. In the Bountagu area for example, houses are being split into several tenancies and more single people are moving in, reducing the number of families living in the area:

*‘When we first did our survey it had a very high percentage of young children, but they have moved on since then.’* (Partnership member)

In Radstock the partnership is acutely aware that the building of 700 new homes will change the local demographic and put additional pressures on existing services and infrastructure; Revoe and Lawrence Weston are aware of newer, growing, Romanian and Polish communities respectively.

- Identifying the change that is sought**

As noted in Section 2, many Big Local areas studied have focused on very similar priorities. In this the 15 areas reflect the top priorities of areas involved in the programme as a whole: children and young people; the environment; health and wellbeing; employment, but it would be superficial to surmise that this means they all have the same context and outcomes in mind. Within each of the priorities, there are numerous approaches to making change and different outcomes sought. An example of how five Big Local partnerships are meeting the needs of children and young people is illustrated below:

**Table 6: Approaches to play and youth provision**

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>Barrowcliff</b> | Community (including children) involvement in design and development of fixed equipment play area           |
| <b>Bountagu</b>    | Staff support for volunteer and sessional staff activity<br><br>Young people’s enterprise training sessions |



|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| <b>Growing Together</b> | Commissions to specialist youth work providers e.g. film based education project, outdoor activities to build young people's confidence and aspirations, <a href="#">centre based and detached youth work</a>   |
| <b>Radstock</b>         | Developing a young people's forum with a devolved budget to set priorities<br>Improved/sage green spaces for unsupervised play  |
| <b>Three Parishes</b>   | Commissions to external providers and sessional youth work<br><br>'Subsidises' to enable children and young people to participate in existing group's activities (e.g. trips/residentials)<br><br>Small grants to groups working with children and young people (e.g. Brownies, Rainbow etc.) |

What is it that drives this difference? Across the 15 areas there is evidence that it can be due to:

- An existing provider with a proven track record who can be commissioned, and where partnerships understand what those agencies offer
- Partnerships wanting to keep an existing provider, or provision, going following withdrawal of a service / other funding
- Partnership members or a paid worker thinking creatively about matching up projects to meet more than one outcome. For example, Birchfield is supporting emerging social enterprises in the area to offer play provision and support for children with a disability.
- A response to very vocally expressed majority views from the community e.g. *'we need to do something for older people'*.
- A detailed understanding of the community profile and targeted support to a particular group of children and young people for example young people at risk of offending (e.g. the Growing Together commission to Free2Talk)
- A volunteer or community group applying for a grant to run a specific project
- 'Upscaling' of small grants projects
- A local resource opportunity which the Big Local can build upon (e.g. Lawrence Weston taking advantage of other programme funding streams).
- A response based on tradition and previous experience of partnership members e.g. *'it's the holidays, we should run a play scheme.'*

There is no implied hierarchy here of one approach being better than another. In some Big Local areas, several of the above factors would apply. What these factors do indicate though, is that often the expression of a need is the driving force and the outcome is very broad based – wanting to do something for children and young people - rather than a nuanced understanding of the change that is sought. For example, in one area where activities for children and young people were prioritised,

the response was to commission a youth service provider to put on an open access youth club with sports, arts and crafts facilities. There is little evidence that the partnership was clear about the purpose of the youth club (i.e. was it simply about providing an activity and getting young people off the streets or was it about helping young people connect and build relationships with each other?). The youth club still runs but it has lower numbers than anticipated and the partnership does not have any measures to assess its value. This can be contrasted with a youth enterprise project where there are clear aims about building young people's confidence and aspirations, giving them opportunities to think about how they might benefit themselves and the community now and when they leave school, and providing project and business planning knowledge and tools.

- **Managing internal change**

Many of the Big Local partnerships studied experienced an uncomfortable start, with several having changed their first chairperson, sometimes in quite acrimonious circumstances. This was the case for five out of the 15 areas. One interviewee talked about a 'power grab' by a particular individual. Some areas had to carefully negotiate patterns of early spend to address tensions and be seen to be equitable across different communities or estates rather than either responding to 'lobbying' for a particular place, or ignoring places not represented by partnership members' interests. Many of the early conflicts between partnership members have died down now though the impact is still felt:

*'The knock-on effects were that we lost a lot of people who originally were very, very involved, and very enthusiastic.'*

*'...they have grown together and less of 'this isn't benefiting my community'; recognise that [they are] working for the whole community.'*

*'At first a lot of 'we want' – now there is more thoughtful discussion.'* (Partnership members)

Many people who are active in Big Local partnerships have never been involved in anything like this before and they have had to learn how to be assertive and to negotiate with others. On the other hand, some partnerships are concerned that they have become too settled and too the same. They recognise that they would benefit from new members bringing new ideas but are also aware that 'outsiders' might feel this is a harmonious group of friends - this is despite the fact they did not necessarily know each other before Big Local.

Even in the 'settled' partnership scenario there is the potential for conflict however, particularly where people are wearing different hats and / or have vested interests (see Section 3):

*'The very fact that people sit on the partnership board means they have their own agendas so quite complicated.'* (Partnership member)

Some LTOs have also expressed the difficulty of being open and transparent when they sit in partnership meetings:

*'Conflicting that [we] can apply for the money and manage it.'* (LTO)

Learning the skills of how to question without getting into an argument or conflict is something some partnership members still find difficult, with the result that they often do not speak up in partnership meetings but have a lot to say outside of them. And it can lead to 'playing it safe' as it is easier to not do something than to speak up and challenge accepted wisdom.

- **Negotiating change is a 'risky business'**

There are those partnerships who thrive on risk:

*'The great thing about this project is that it is for ten years, no other funding that I have ever come across has been longer than three! And that means that you can take not uneducated risks, or uncalculated risks, but you can try new things out and there is still room for learning...'* (Partnership member)

There are those who are learning to live and work with certain levels of risk:

*'... we're not risk adverse, we're risk aware, we know what the risks are and sometimes we'll get it wrong, you know, and we'll get it wrong for the right reasons, we won't get it wrong because we're incapable. We'll get it wrong because the reasoning was that that was a good idea, it didn't deliver and .... we had to self-evaluate.'* (Partnership member)

Finally, there are some partnerships who try to 'negotiate out' any risk, which usually means agreeing to act on those things they feel they have control over and/ or using tried and tested organisations, but wary about handing responsibility to others who might have a good idea but no track record. Observations and interviews illustrate that sometimes people are more concerned about the risks involved in giving a grant of a few hundred pounds to a local individual or project than they are about the risk of taking on large assets or challenging power holders.

This issue is further addressed in Section 5 Balancing Acts.

## 4.2 Catalyst for change

It is important to look beyond Big Local processes and delivery mechanisms, in order to identify changes in the local area, and to assess the tangible and sometimes intangible ways in which the 'presence' of (and activity in) Big Local appears to mobilise other developments.

- **Seeing the change**

*'When you look at what we have achieved, we've got new groups setting up... We've got more respect from the community... We've got recognition from people. We've got people receiving what we are trying to do in a pretty positive way. We've got people working together like the [X] group, that was one of our finest hours getting them to actually talk to each other and play nicely. We've got different groups working together.....'* (Partnership member)

This quote points to the way that some Big Local groups are measuring success – through implicit indicators of active community groups, positive responses in the community, groups and organisations working together. In other words, people know this sense of 'success' when they see it, and what they see is often the spin off from some more planned project or activity. A lot of groups talk about how difficult it is to 'prove' evidence of such change, maybe because there is a slow gradual progression towards change, or because they haven't got there yet and there is nothing to see, but several areas talk of the 'feel' of the area being different, that there is a 'buzz'. This can be because of the physical and visible presence of a Big Local. In Bountagu, for example, the location within the Big Local area of a very busy community hub has created a safer environment for residents and stopped the drug dealing and associated crime on their doorsteps. In Barrowcliff, the Big Local flagship project, the park, means that *'you can't help but sit in that park and talk to other people ....'* (Partnership member). Alternatively, it might be of a less tangible but significant, improved

community 'vibe', as described in Whitley Bay Big Local ('a mind change'), Birchfield and Ramsey Million:

*'Something that isn't really truly measurable is that I was talking with the community sergeant who was doing a surgery in the street and I said, how are you and he said do you know it's amazing, it's buzzing today, it was a Saturday morning, lots of people are out and about and he said the atmosphere in town was different ..... He noticed that the place had a bit more of a buzz around it and other people have said that too.'* (Partnership member)

- **Big Local as enablers of change**

There has been a conscious effort in some areas to provide activities which aim to connect individuals and to network groups and organisations.

*'Energy of people meeting together, leads on to other things.'* (Partnership member)

There is evidence of Big Local acting as a springboard for people and people's lives changing dramatically as a result of opportunities provided through the programme e.g. increased confidence and skills built through involvement in a partnership or activity have led to employment. People have formed significant friendships with others they have met through Big Local and been opened up to opportunities that have led to further community activity:

*'I've got goals to look forward to now which I didn't have before. It's just given a brighter outlook on life for me and my family.'* (Local resident)

A participant in a UnLtd funded project who started a [community newspaper](#) now mentors others in the wider area to set up their own publications and provides opportunities for people to develop their journalistic skills:

*'I'm just grateful that Ramsey Million was here because without it, and I'm telling you this now, without Ramsey Million this newspaper would never have happened....'*

*'Wherever I can I'll try and help them get work in other places because it's the least I can do because they are helping me. This all stemmed from what I've been doing in this area...'* (UnLtd award winner who edits local newspaper).

#### **Snapshot 18: Kay and Susan's Stories**

CAS Training Services started out as a volunteer-led employment advice project which has grown, and attracted matched funding, with support from Northfleet Big Local. Kay and Susan have been attending the service for almost a year and have both become volunteers with longer term plans to return to work. These are their stories which can also be viewed in the film on [Northfleet Big Local: The projects we are involved with](#).

Kay says:

*'I had a bit of a breakdown after losing my parents, my job. I had to move out of my home. Chris and Sue and Ruby and Mark, they all picked me up and give me the confidence to get back on my feet, and to help others and to get them to come for help as well.'*

*Now I do this volunteering, it makes such a difference cos you're helping people. You recognise vulnerable people and you can give them guidance.*

*I wouldn't have survived without... I was totally broken. If I didn't have this, I wouldn't be here now.'*

Susan says:

*'My friend, who also works in the area, said about Sue and Chris' job club down the Hive, so I came down to it and I've been coming ever since.'*

*The [shop I worked in] closed at Bluewater in 2007 and I became my parents' full-time carer. Obviously my Dad went and my Mom went into the Home and I found it a bit difficult. I had to change my life around. Now both my parents aren't here anymore...*

*I'm hoping to open my own business in the Northfleet area, looking after children.*

*I wouldn't be where I am now without Sue and Chris and everyone that works for CAS Job Club.*

*It made a big difference cos they've helped me a lot with my confidence issues and other issues that I've had.*

*It's been a huge change for me in these last three years and I've come out of it pretty good, I reckon.'*

Many Big Local areas have invested energy in bringing groups together with other groups, residents with agencies, agencies with agencies. In some cases this was a reasonably 'common sense' activity - not necessarily with a sense of a deliberate longer term strategy, but which, co-incidentally, has produced additional or unexpected outcomes. For example, an informal group meeting at a community centre on Lawrence Weston started to attract young Polish women. This in turn identified their needs for English Language support and resulted in the development of ESOL provision.

Growing Together Big Local used some of its funding to support local curling groups and a curling league:

*'... bring people from different estates together and meet each other. People bring food, different cultures and languages. .... Very diverse group of local people, and attracted new people e.g. some people from the Bangladeshi community.'*

*'A big success has been people now travel to events. Previously the different estates were very insular.'* (Partnership members)

In others it is down to strategic thinking about how best to make things happen, for example, the capital developments in Lawrence Weston.

In Big Local areas where there is not an obvious natural boundary or a history of connectedness, such as Three Parishes, Grassland Hasmoor and Growing Together Big Locals, small towns and villages have begun to connect with some sense of improving cohesion.

*'Big Local really shows the coming together of the two communities which, at the outset of the project, had little in common and no real network of communication.'* (Partnership member)

Whitley Bay Big Local is trying to turn round the community's relationship to the council, bring community voices to the council and influence change in the town through regular meetings with statutory agencies (See Snapshot 15). It sees part of its role as adding value through facilitating conversation and describes its statutory partner meetings as an open and honest forum, where the council and WBBL work seamlessly to promote positive regeneration of the town and a lasting legacy

for future generations. This strategic way of working is about kick starting relationships that will have a long lasting impact:

*‘It’s about everyone pushing together for the good of the area and not competing... we have to think strategically. Because when the million is used up what other money can we bring in to keep things going?’*

*‘We are trying to use it to our benefit really, we are trying to make sure that it allows us to open doors and create partnerships, so that we can make that money stretch a lot further’.*  
(Partnership members)

There are also examples of where Big Local areas have been, or are likely to be, a catalyst for major physical or structural change – beyond how an area ‘feels’ and the level of community activity they have stimulated. In Lawrence Weston, Big Local appears to be a significant catalyst for the implementation of an existing [neighbourhood development plan](#). A major opportunity is the redevelopment of an old college site and the partnership, with Ambition Lawrence Weston (LTO), is pushing for a supermarket, mixed housing and a community hub. Although taking longer than expected, *‘The supermarket is wanted by 86% of residents and when that comes it will demonstrate that resident involvement can change things’* (Paid worker). [Lawrence Weston Big Local](#) is also capitalising on current opportunities to enable future change through support for leveraging in additional investment. For example, it underwrote the cost of writing the bid for Coastal Communities Fund money, and is working with local energy providers to ensure an annual community fund. In Barrowcliff, partners can see how the structure set up for the purposes of Big Local could be exactly the right vehicle for securing and managing future funding programmes. In Growing Together, there is a synergy between the partnership and its LTO and between the Big Local partnership and its boundary with the Neighbourhood Forum and the Neighbourhood Plan boundary. This should ensure resident-led structures for the future, creating a critical mass of activity and intention.

### 4.3 Leadership and influence

Leadership in the Big Local context is very much about forming and articulating a collective view about the priorities of and future vision for each area, i.e. collective sense-making, and mobilising residents in how to get there.

#### Resident led

The report has reflected on how partnerships are working in Section 3. As noted, there are different partnership approaches and in some areas leadership can be seen to be exercised within a formal traditional structure. Some of the areas studied only held ‘closed’ partnership meetings, in others all meetings were open, and in Northfleet they operate a ‘closed’ executive meeting, followed by a public meeting as information sharing. In Three Parishes, they found holding a lot of public meetings to be unwieldy and so held partner only meetings; this was questioned and now they are looking to hold at least one public meeting a year that anyone can attend. The reality for most Big Local partnerships is that they are open to ‘new’ people coming along – after all it is public money and many struggle to get enough people involved – but that unless people are already involved, they wouldn’t understand what the partnership is, never mind when and where it meets. In terms of meeting venues, this again varies. Some Big Local areas, such as Northfleet and Radstock, always meeting in the same place because it is thought to have a neutral air about it. Others such as Three Parishes and Growing Together which comprise distinct villages/neighbourhoods rotate their

meetings around the whole area so as to be seen to be fair and accessible and bring together disparate communities. In the latter examples, this is part of the process of trying to operate with a vision for the area as a whole, despite otherwise obviously divided communities.

Nearly all the Big Local areas talk about a collective and consensual style of working. For example:

*'I think we have built a good relationship between ourselves in this period of time. Each person's opinion is valued. OK, everyone has their little pet projects and hobby horses but we bow to the democratic decision.'* (Partnership member)

Observations at partnership meetings illustrate that people try to find a way through that suits all interests but the extent to which everyone has a voice can be questioned in some partnerships. There are examples of paid workers and agencies dominating, with little input from residents, or just a few key individuals making the decisions with others deferring to them. In these areas, leadership appears to follow traditionally limited forms based on previous experiences of 'how leadership works' or deference to elected members or professionals. One resident partner commented:

*'They need to talk to more people, the Big Local...I feel as though the ones that are making the decisions are just the ones within the group...I class myself as talking to the real people and I think it's a bit (of an) issue with the ones ... leading it, and not actually talking to the real people.'* (Partnership member)

On the other hand, engaging a wide section of the community is not easy:

*'I think it's very difficult to be truly representative of your society where you live because it doesn't matter how much door knocking that you do. You can't engage with every single person, and not every single person wants to engage with you, so I think you have to do the best with the responses that you get. And those residents who want to get involved can only use the results of the consultation. I personally found it quite difficult to be representative.'*

*'We're a lot more knowledgeable now about how to do things. We're still not there yet. We know a lot more about the community and how to do things. We know that things take a lot longer than we really want them to do, so it's quite a difficult area of work.'* (Partnership members)

Spreading involvement and decision making and mobilising residents across the Big Local area is something that Big Locals struggle with. Most areas talk about the challenges of engaging young people. Whilst they can get people to come to events, translating this into active involvement (e.g. through partnership membership or formal youth forums, proves difficult). What Big

Local partnerships do not seem to question much though is the way they organise and the style of their meetings which tend to be of the traditional board type, with formal structures and processes and can be very long (3-4 hours in some cases). Although several partnership members have described the meetings as boring, nothing much changes to make them more lively and engaging, or indeed to find other ways of making decisions, at community events for example.

Community leadership can be fostered in many ways. In Grassland Hasmoor Big Local, for example, the chair was selected from outside the area on the basis of skill, impartiality and community respect, reflecting and reinforcing an understanding that people can be involved in Big Local in different ways.

*'I'd like to see the community more involved. But here it takes all people's energy just to survive, especially when they have young children.'* (Partnership member)



*'... because what we're interested in is not that one leader, it's the collective leadership across the community and actually what [\*] does is allow that.'* (Partnership member)

Thus, in the Grassland Hasmoor structure, working groups are in effect where a lot of the 'action' action takes place – they are made up of residents who are not necessarily on the Big Local partnership. In Whitley Bay, they are looking for ways to involve people who might not be part of any project; '[We] want individuals to feel part of the Big Local scheme'. These outward looking approaches are important if Big Local is to be meaningful as the area and not just the partnership. Whitley Bay Big Local has been careful to support local activity without trying to 'own' it all or claim credit for some of its sponsored activity and yet at the evaluation [workshop](#) in August 2016, around 30 people participated because they had an identity with Big Local.

## **Influence**

Big Local partnerships are, to varying degrees, interested in influencing the local community, service providers and political structures. In this evaluation, we are particularly interested in the role of influence in relation to local services and institutional structures, and, in the current socio-economic context, whether Big Local investment complements existing public services, and the extent to which it acts as an attempted substitute for reduced public services.

Broadly, there are two key ways in which Big Locals have managed to exert some influence. The first is through being there and being active, and in these examples there is an importance to the money – the £1 million allocated to each Big Local area – it creates the sense that Big Local partnerships are 'serious players' and have a credibility within the community (for example in Northfleet and Lawrence Weston). The second way is where there has been a conscious effort to influence what happens in an area through an increased and collective understanding of how the local political and policy context works and using this knowledge to make change in the local area and / or lobby those seen to have power. Here, the money is largely irrelevant though there are examples where being seen as managing the money efficiently and effectively enhances their legitimacy with power holders.

- **The money as leverage**

*'Having Big Local money and a structure has provided a chance to meet local councillors and bridged the gap between the council and residents.'* (Partnership member)

The 'million' enables the Big Local partnerships to negotiate on a different footing to many other community groups who do not have such resources to bring to the table. Although, there are a few examples of councils not 'playing ball' in some Big Local areas, there are many illustrations of councils supporting Big Local initiatives. For example, in more than one area, local councils impressed by the work of the Big Locals' contribution to improving park and play areas, have agreed to cover maintenance contracts for the play equipment in the coming years. A million pounds may be 'small fry' to a local authority or a private developer, but if targeted on an activity which helps them deliver something seen as perhaps not a priority but beneficial to the local community, then they are often willing to forge positive relationships:

*'I actually think it will become more influential over the next couple of years, once we have got some successes, but I do think it has had an influence. I think local councillors think that we are a lot more important than we actually [are]...'* (Partnership member)

On the other hand, in the context of austerity and deficit reduction measures, there are concerns that Big Local is picking up the pieces from the cuts in public services. Big Local works with the

principle that the money should not be used to replace statutory services. Many of the cuts that people see at first hand, however, are not of services which are statutory duties. Most Big Locals have a priority around children and young people and are covering the costs of activities that had been funded from elsewhere ten years ago. Equally, some of the environmental improvements carried out by Big Local, particularly those which enhance the look of a place like planters, were previously provided by the council.

*'There is a bit of an issue about the Council dragging its heels because they think Big Local has the money – so for example all the planters in the centre of Northfleet were put in by Big Local. Big Local should not be a public service, but an augmentation.'* (Paid worker)

In more general terms, this illustrates in practical and concrete terms the issue of additionality and the contested boundary between state services and community (or social) action.

This raises difficult conversations in many Big Local partnerships. In Ramsey, the partnership is keen that it is not there to plug gaps. The Big Local partnership had identified youth activities as a priority even while the council service was still running a youth service. The council's youth service has now withdrawn activities. The Big Local youth project is run quite differently, and in their view, much better because it is integrated into a suite of children and young people's activities, and they have used evidence of its success to attract funding from outside Big Local. In Growing Together, they accept that they have picked up a previously council funded service but are tapering their financial contribution so that they are supporting the transition from a council run service to one based on a different model.

As a funder, Big Locals are able to influence how services are provided as well as what is provided, in particular encouraging commissioned organisations to provide opportunities for resident involvement and personal development:

*'There are more volunteers now though as one of my strong things was if working with us then [the service providers] need to be working with volunteers – so have influenced them a bit. Using money in particular ways changing and shaping other organisations, not just using the money.'* (Partnership member)

- **It is not (just) about the money**

The Big Local pathway is a process that helps build local knowledge, understanding and confidence. Active residents know more about their area because they have created a community profile and have been able to prioritise local people's aspirations in their plans. Thus, they are often seen by other bodies as having a good idea of what is needed and what might work. The Ramsey Million community plan contained evidence from the town's residents that was used by the council when it was negotiating with private developers. In North Northfleet, residents feel that Big Local has given them legitimacy and made it easier to negotiate with the council and large development companies; indeed here the Ebbsfleet Development Corporation is using part of a Big Local film in its own promotional material.

*'I think it's important what we've learnt especially, when it comes to the council...Twist the arm, twist the thighs...'* (Partnership member)

Big Local areas also bring resources other than money which suggests a growth in community influence - people who want to do something in their community - time and structure:

- **People:** In Grassland Hasmoor (GHBL) the very presence of Big Local stimulated the Green and Open Spaces working group who are working closely with the relevant local authorities

to improve pathways and make them more accessible, something which local rangers see as a great opportunity for making things happen. GHBL has also harnessed volunteers to deliver their summer holiday and food projects, leading to a reputation with councils and others that residents can make things happen.

*'Compared to other groups, Big Local is as good as it gets.'* (Local Councillor)

- **Time:** Big Locals will be active for at least ten years. They are not going away and many are steadily and stealthily increasing their reputation. Bountagu, Three Parishes and Barrowcliff talk about how they have been trying to get schools on board since the start, and now the schools are coming to them. In Lawrence Weston, residents are involved in strategic long term change – economic as well as social. As a ten-year programme Big local is enabling the partnership and its LTO to build relationships with service providers and tackle big issues such as fuel poverty through its work around locally produced energy.

*'... a long period in which to do something substantial.'* (Paid worker)
- **Structure:** We have commented earlier on the very traditional structures that Big Local partnerships have developed, and maybe, as noted, there is a downside to this in that they are not always the most open and participatory arrangements. However, there is evidence that these structures are often welcomed by other service providers and power holders. They fulfil a useful function in being the 'go to' group and are acknowledged and respected as such. As European funding programmes come on stream (*'light touch they are not'*), Barrowcliff Big Local Steering Group recognises that it is now in a position to engage on a stronger and more equal footing than previously because it has a structure recognised as legitimate by other partners. And as a Housing Association officer who sits on the Barrowcliff partnership stated: *'it would be a no brainer'* not to work in partnership with them.

Lawrence Weston has taken a particularly strategic approach to influencing Bristol City Council and neighbouring authorities. It used its structure to develop a comprehensive Neighbourhood Development Plan before approaching Bristol City Council and neighbouring local authorities, and were able to demonstrate clearly what, and how, they could contribute to wider spatial planning.

Big Local does not work in a vacuum and the extent of influence that can be evidenced is affected by a number of factors. For example, those areas that had pre-existing effective structures and connections have started at a different point to those areas that have traditionally been more marginalised and isolated. In Hanwell, for instance, EASE (local youth agency and also the LTO) already had connections that have paved the way for the Big Local group:

*'With other organisations and with the council, I think [our influence] is more pronounced, again because of EASE, because EASE has got that track record and that history and that pre-existing connection so Hanwell Big Local is, in a way, an extension and an intensification of that, so I think there we are making more of a noise, more quickly.'* (LTO)

In Lawrence Weston, the Big Local is in effect a delivery arm of Ambition Lawrence Weston, the LTO, which was on a strategic long term mission to change the area before Big Local came on the scene.

*‘... there is a level of democracy in the area missing.’ (Partnership member)*

This contrasts starkly with Revoe where the residents have felt very marginalised from decision making structures in the mainstream. In some of the more rural areas such as Three Parishes and Ramsey, the county council feels somewhat remote and there are several levels of local democracy in between. As noted, a shared narrative is that Big Local areas have been ‘forgotten’. Big Locals are therefore proactively establishing communication mechanisms in many areas. Ramsey Million used its Market Place funding to set up the Working Together Group which brings together all the key organisations in the town, including the Town Council. In Lawrence Weston the partnership recognises the importance of agencies working together and pooling skills and resources wherever possible – or at least not running things ‘in competition’.

*‘I sometimes think that the county thinks of us as the back of beyond and they forget we exist.’ (Partnership member)*

Whitley Bay Big Local has been on a mission to build bridges with the local authority. There is a regular meeting with a range of service providers which is leading to some influence and to increasing synergy between the aims of Whitley bay Big Local and the council. For example, some of the Whitley Bay Big Local community profile and plan is now also contained within the council’s development plan, as the landscape architect who carried out the plan consultation explains [here](#). Influence can however, be particularly hard to attribute to Big Local where the partnership sees its role in supporting existing and new groups develop but consciously takes a back seat in claiming achievement. Whitley Bay Big Local might want to claim credit for some things, but it is also keen to ensure that community groups ‘own’ success. Big Local has provided the support, often small scale, and the groups then get on with meeting their objectives and rightly take the credit. For instance, support for the Friends of Whitley Park (including the optimism generated in the town through positive Big Local messages) has strengthened the group to the extent that it was able to persuade the council to see the park as an asset not a liability, and then to redraw the seafront regeneration boundary on a map. This means the park is now perceived as an attraction worthy of further investment.

#### 4.4 Expectations

There are a variety of, sometimes conflicting, sets of expectations of both the scale and timescale of ambition and achievement. Partnership members feel a responsibility to Local Trust to deliver the programme well and to make a noticeable difference in their areas. They also feel accountable to residents in the area about how they manage and use the million to make the area a better place to live as well as to their active colleagues in terms of not letting people down which can put a strain on overcommitted individuals. Sometimes the expectations that people put on themselves can be quite overwhelming, especially when they have lots going on in their personal lives:

*‘It’s determination to make a difference, that’s what keeps me going. I mean I’ll be honest, I am tired. Really tired at the moment, but I think that’s because I’m juggling three or four different things at once at the minute...’ (Partnership member)*

Residents who are employed to work with Big Local also feel the pressure:

*‘As a local resident there are advantages that local people know me and can make connections. I think people are more comfortable with a local resident as the worker. I’m a*

*local resident so not coming in from the outside and I'm well connected. The downside is if a project fails, that's egg on the face and I'd not want to be connected with that. I'd really feel it.'* (Paid worker)

Some residents have expressed concerns about the level of expectation from the programme – what it means to be a partnership member and the responsibility that that entails. They talk about people coming in off the street and having to get grips with complex processes when they have never been to a meeting before in their lives. Although many acknowledge that they have learnt a lot and now feel comfortable with the Big Local process, they are worried about new people getting involved:

*'... new people, we try and absorb them but it's working out how to get them in because if you tell them too much at once they are swamped and then they – instead of actually taking a deep breath and saying, 'Just hang on a minute, I haven't quite got that first bit,' ... they'll just disappear. .... There are some people that slot in and there are others that you really do have to hand-hold all the way through and do you tell them a lot in the beginning or do you not tell them a lot? Because when you tell them you want them to sign the confidentiality agreement and the code of conduct because .... is that going to put them off or is it not? Do they understand why they are signing it?'* (Partnership member)

Despite efforts to make the programme light touch, and to provide a range of support structures, the threshold for active involvement can still seem insurmountably high for many and runs at odds with the desire for an inclusive resident-led process. Many of the most active residents interviewed have stressed the steep learning curve they have been through, mostly learning by doing. In North Northfleet, residents talk about the process of working their way through the planning system and understanding the planning documents from the Paramount and Garden City developers. In Westfield (see Snapshot 7), the partnership has had a similar experience to other Big Locals in working through council planning and legal structures to arrange an asset transfer. They describe the process as hardnosed bargaining through which they had to battle on ceaselessly. In the meantime, they had to be seen to be doing something by residents not directly involved in Big Local in order to meet their expectations of something happening in the area. And there is always *'a risk of putting effort into things that then don't happen.'* (Partnership member)

There is a clear connection here to time, on the one hand people have learnt that everything seems to take longer than they expected, and on the other, people less involved want to see things happening now. As discussed in Section 2, Big Local makes claims about the area becoming 'an even better place to live' and people are all too ready to criticise if this doesn't appear to be the case. This is particularly true in the areas that have previously experienced initiatives and where a perceived failure to deliver in the past undermines credibility now and expectations are low:

*'Might it tarnish Big Local work now? Lottery money in 2000s with the [x Trust] developing plans for a community hub (i.e. been here before?). Barnardo's/Drug Project/Credit Union squeezed into one maisonette. Promise of ... money for hub, but fell through as one shop keeper blocked planning permissions and Council withdrew. .... Money used on legal fees and delays meant an additional cost of £1m therefore scheme collapsed. Project ended in 2012 with withdrawal of funding.'* (Paid worker)

Others talk about the expectations associated with the allocation of £1 million – *'a lot of money to people on this estate'* and ambitions to *'change the world,'* whilst others counter that a million pounds won't engineer a different community and the jam is being spread too thinly across too many projects and too much for residents to manage. Although some partnerships delegate responsibility

for managing projects and activities to their paid staff or the LTO, many partnership members feel a lot of responsibility for project success and place high expectations to deliver this on themselves. Observations of partnership meetings highlight very different approaches to managing the money and different understanding of the ethos of Big Local, with some exuding confidence and ensuring their meetings are 'to the point' whilst others deliberate over minute detail:

*'Confident that things will happen as there is a momentum around development - community hub/new housing/supermarket up and running in 2-3 years' time – big plans for the future – Using Localism Act to develop freedoms on planning/land use.'* (Paid worker)

*'I am not saying it is not difficult, but I think we have got quite clear objectives, so we know what we are going to do and what we want. And we are not trying to change the whole world, we are focusing on small, quite small but big impact projects. So I think we can do it, I think we can.'* (Partnership member)

Being a partnership member in your own community is not an easy position to hold (*Very difficult to meet people's expectations of me as a volunteer board member*) and it can be made much more difficult by the expectations of local stakeholders. As mentioned above, some feel a pressure to pick up council services:

*'The context is so different now than it was at the start of BL – will have no credibility with local people if don't provide some of these services.'* (Partnership member)

Sometimes this pressure comes from the council itself – and even where it doesn't expect Big Local to pick up the pieces, there are perceptions that resources are not going into some Big Local areas because, as in Birchfield, they *'think we have a million pounds and are sorted.'* (Partnership member)

## 4.5 Sustainability and legacy

In the second year of the evaluation, we have begun to explore how changes arising through Big Local – including structures, activities, ethos and outcomes - endure and why. It is too early to draw firm conclusions yet and so we have also looked at the extent to which longer-term thinking influences decisions and processes now.

The way in which Big Locals use their resources is for the most part determined by a conscious effort to leave something behind, yet the reasoning behind their decision-making varies enormously. Many areas have used their money to create physical assets for the community e.g. buildings, parks and play areas:

*'Over the next three or four years I'd like to see us find somewhere that we could convert into a community centre. Because I'd like some sort of legacy and I've got a feeling that if we go on spending money, and we're spending 60% of it on this core of workers and renting offices, there'll be nothing left at the end of it, there'll be no legacy, and I'd like to see some sort of legacy left for the community.'* (Partnership member)

Some other areas have taken an opposite stance, focusing on their legacy through paid staff employed to develop community skills and confidence:

*'I think we have all picked up a little bit when we have gone to Big Local events, where people have said oh you have got a fantastic this or that, and we are sitting there feeling quite envious thinking that would be terrific, but then you sort of think well how do they follow that*



*up? How do you? .... Is everyone just going to have a great time and then go away? It is to try and share our skills, get more people skilled up, more confident, more happy to lead projects.’ (Partnership member)*

There are a minority of residents who do not think the issue of sustainability or legacy is that important. They believe they have been deprived of resources and positive outcomes for too long and should use the money as they want now. Alternatively, the ebb and flow of Big Locals will mean that some things survive and, inevitably, others do not:

*‘It’s a bit like being on a surfboard, riding a surfwave – you don’t know where the wave’s going to go. So you ride it, and if it fades out, you pick up the next one and go along with that. Some things haven’t worked but others will work – that’s the way things seem to me.’ (Partnership member)*

There are a range of approaches to sustainability and legacy of Big Local across the case studies. Examples are given below, though each area might be taking more than one approach:

- **Incorporation of the Big Local partnership** as an entity in itself. Some partnerships see this as a way to ensure sustainability because the organisation will live on after the Big Local programme has finished. Although the spirit of Big Local is about people being able to get on and do things without being bogged down by internal and organisational matters, (hence the LTO model), some Big Locals feel this is the only way to develop – where the LTO is not prepared to take on the responsibility of a community hub, for example. Whitley Bay is expected to be the first of the case study Big Local areas to go down this route but it is something being explored in several other areas.

In addition, Growing Together and Ramsey are anticipating that their respective LTOs will continue the Big Local way of working and become the Big Local legacy body:

*‘[Chair of LTO] and I have the same vision – want to see RNT and RM join together. A larger body of the admin/engine room function and a group doing community consultation and events is the way to go.’ (LTO)*

- **Physical and environmental legacy** is about leaving something visible from the Big Local programme. In the Three Parishes Big Local has supported the allotment group to plant trees for the future. In Whitley bay residents are influencing the regeneration of the seafront. In Northampton, Growing Together is supporting environmental improvements which should leave the river in a much improved state, and in Westfield the partnership has saved the only community building in the area from closure.
- **Building skills and knowledge and networks** of community groups and individuals so that they are better equipped to survive, to be enterprising and to do things differently in the future. This relates very much to the rationale for the programme and to the first two Big Local outcomes (Communities will be better able to identify local needs and take action in response to them; People will have increased skills and confidence, so that they continue to identify and respond to needs in the future). This is a key focus for Bountagu where there has been little infrastructure and community support in the past and for Whitley Bay where it is linked to opening up communication with the council and other service providers:



*'[An] open and honest forum, where the council and WBBL work seamlessly to promote positive regeneration of the town and a lasting legacy for future generations.'* (Whitley Bay workshop)

*'...the legacy will be less tangible – building people's relationships, capacity and influence over their own lives.'* (LTO)

- **Supporting social business activity and enterprise** so that the money is invested and has a return, rather than just being spent. This ranges from the modest e.g. charging people for activities, through to the more ambitious e.g. creation of a well-planned social enterprise. Grassmoor Hasland partnership expects to spend a fairly high proportion of its money on the infrastructure to sustain it while it exists but it also expects all activities to be match-funded and levers in additional money wherever it can:

*'Grassland Hasmoor has a 50/50 use of money i.e. 50% goes on infrastructure ... we are determined to grow our millions in our local plan ... into at least £2 [for every £1 spent] ... So, every project is meant to have a level of match funding attached to it ... the delivery out is bringing a lot more in the other way, ...a £10,000 down payment on the skate park is going to bring a skate park worth £70,000 in, that's a huge amount of matching.'* (Leeds workshop)

- For Lawrence Weston, sustainability is about putting in place the conditions for community economic development and leaving resources behind for the benefit of local people, though not necessarily in the hands of local people. For example, they funded a bid writer (£9,000) to make an application to the Coastal Communities Fund. They then asked local businesses to chip in to the cost as potential beneficiaries of the Fund and actually made a profit of £3000. The application was successful and South Gloucestershire Council is the accountable body for a project involving £1.2 million further investment to tackle barriers to employment.

- **Creation of a 'model'** where the Big Local model is seen as an effective way of working that can be continued e.g. Birchfield is starting to discuss how Big Local can be a forerunner to resident-led neighbourhood management and the Growing Together structure and boundary overlays the Neighbourhood Forum and its developing Neighbourhood Plan.

*'Lawrence Weston have good relationships with large companies particularly with renewable energy companies. Got some of the profit back from one, thought done well, then formed relationship with Bristol energy co-op who put in a planning application to develop a solar farm. Big Local offered its support if it could have a cut of the profit. ... And now already had an upfront payment of £155k and will get a payment every year for next 25 years ... Always looking at economic sustainability ...'* (Birchfield workshop)

- **Leaving behind a cultural legacy** – people feeling more positive about where they live and having a greater affinity and identity with the area e.g. through understanding the 'heritage' of the area as in Ramsey. Ramsey Million has invested in a separately branded 'Discovering Ramsey' project which aims to make residents more aware of the significance of historical sites in the town and create a sense of community pride about where they live.

The individual rationales behind these different approaches rests on a number of factors: the local socio-economic context; history of community activity and support pre-Big Local; previous/existing experience of enterprise; individuals' knowledge and drive; working relationships with the LTO; extent of partnership working with other agencies. Thus, the current operating models vary. For example, Catton Grove Big Local pays agencies to deliver services from its hub whilst others make a

charge for use in order to cover operating costs. Growing Together provides grants for agencies to deliver services but on a tapering scale to give them a 'kick start' and encourage them to be more resourceful so that they continue after the Big Local money has run its course. This may help counter the problem of:

*'... everything is going to external organisations...the big contracts have all been commissioned out to external organisations ... They are here because it's 100% funded work for them. The money is not theirs; they are not going to be here... I'm worried that they will deliver but as soon as the money is not there then they won't be there either.'* (Paid worker)

There is a balance to be struck for most areas, covering costs through income generation but also subsidising activities to ensure access to locally based provision ('People round here struggle to pay the 50p for the film club': Partnership member). There is a sense for some that there are conflicting priorities stemming from Local Trust – on the one hand local people are supposed to be working towards community based outcomes (e.g. healthy eating and gardening projects). On the other hand, they are expected to be also generating income which changes the project into a profit making market garden project:

*'Want to keep going. Scary to think of some of the vulnerable people that come along – where will they be without this? The openness of this all is great – very inclusive.'* (Paid worker)

*'Just because it's a building suddenly it's a social investment project. No, the building is the means to the end of delivering the outcomes that they want to achieve.'* (Paid worker)

In some areas, a lot of current time and money is being invested in training local people e.g. in youth work or mentoring skills, so that they will be able to continue providing once the money has gone. But, there will always be some activities that bear a cost e.g. retaining a volunteer base to keep costs down has itself a support cost.

*'Well, we want the volunteers to come along and when we talk about it and come up with ideas, we want them to then pick it up and run with it. But they haven't got the training to do it. They haven't got the expertise.'* (Paid worker)

Sustainability and legacy are concerns for many Big Local partnership members. Perhaps it is helpful to understand sustainability as ensuring a service or building continues to operate, and legacy as leaving behind a model or culture of working practice:

*'The key is building buy in, self-help and the confidence to achieve. Some things though cost money and may not go ahead in the same way.'* (Partnership members)

## 4.6 Concluding remarks

As noted at the start of this section, there is no neat, single, typology of the Big Local areas studied. Areas are neither wholly one 'thing' or another. Rather they operate across multiple dimensions and on a spectrum or continuum and their position against any one dimension may change over time. Spending priorities, and how spend is allocated may change (from small grants to a more commissioning based model). Governance can shift from very open models to more proscribed structures – and back again as partnerships try and refresh their membership. Some, such as Barrowcliff, have moved from predominantly capital spend to revenue expenditure, whilst others currently spending on projects are beginning to think of substantial capital investment in a community hub or asset.

The following table is not ‘exhaustive’ but aims to give a ‘flavour’ of the different dimensions Big Local partnerships operate across, with differing points on that spectrum or continuum.

**Table 7: Different continuums of partnership working**

|                                |   |   |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| ‘Open’ membership/governance   | ↔ | ‘Closed’ membership/governance                    |
| Responding to immediate needs  | ↔ | Aspirations focused /strategic vision             |
| Small grants                   | ↔ | Commissioning/contracting of substantial activity |
| Inward facing                  | ↔ | Outward looking                                   |
| Capital spend                  | ↔ | Revenue spend                                     |
| Risk averse                    | ↔ | Risk taking                                       |
| Investment focused             | ↔ | Spend focused                                     |
| Community development focused  | ↔ | Project focused                                   |
| Protecting what already exists | ↔ | Change agent                                      |
| Enterprise model               | ↔ | Charity/model                                     |

The framework above could be a way to explore the differing rationale and models behind how Big Locals are operating, what this looks like in practice and how the approach is supporting progress towards Big Local outcomes.

## Section 5

### Balancing Acts

#### Overview

This section examines

- factors that are helping Big Local areas deliver their plans
- how Big Local partnerships are ‘balancing’ competing demands.

#### Summary

Big Local partnerships are having to negotiate a series of often complex balancing acts in terms of working to achieve their long term outcomes. At the most basic level, this is the tension between being seen to be doing something in their community now – as opposed to achieving more ambitious objectives in the long term.

**Partnerships appear to be working more effectively** where day to day management and activities are underpinned by that **long-term vision**. The partnership is also visible to the community – often through running, supporting or having a presence at large scale community events (Hanwell and Northfleet) rather than operating behind closed doors and expecting the community to come to the partnership. Balancing the Big Local tasks with the social functions of partnership working are critical factors in sustaining engagement.

Big Local areas are also balancing **needs and wants**. Is what a community (or just the most vocal part of that community) wants what is actually needed? Residents may agree on ‘the problem’ but be divided on the solution. In Blackpool Revue, for instance, the agreed problem is visible substance misuse. What is needed, for some, is to move the problem away – for others it is the provision of advice and support pending treatment options. Partnerships, particularly in the most deprived areas, are also having to balance competing needs and growing demand on local services.

Big Local is intended as a catalyst for change – bringing about positive new developments in their area. However, in the current economic climate, they often take on the role of protecting the status quo: substituting for service cuts by the local authority or trying to protect existing assets which are under threat of closure (e.g. the library in Three Parishes). With further changes to local government finance, this tension is likely to increase in the coming years.

Managing Big Local at the local level requires constant judgements – wanting to be innovative but at the same time ensuring that resources are ‘safe in the partnerships’ hands’. They are required to make complex, often difficult, decisions which affect their immediate neighbours. They are balancing competing demands for their time – and Big Local resources. Big Local can, as one partnership diary keeper noted, be fun as well as hard work. What is impressive, especially in these hard times, is the commitment of resident partners to **‘the long haul’** and hanging onto the belief, or hope, they can indeed make their community an even better place to live.

Partnerships can be extremely inward looking – focusing on their immediate area. Such a **hyper-local** approach can be valued by residents in that services are delivered at the very local level. However, these are the partnerships which tend to be struggling to see **‘the bigger picture’** of the broader contexts in which Big Local is operating and may lack influence with those in power who make decisions about their community.

## 5.1 Introduction

In April 2016, the Our Bigger Story summary [Interim Evaluation Report](#), identified some of the key learning from the early development of Big Local. Almost one year on, a number of the tensions and challenges have become, if not more acute, certainly more pronounced. Indeed, the perceived strengths of the Big Local approach may also be at the root of some of the tensions and challenges that areas have to manage. It is these balancing acts that the following section analyses:

- the ambitions of Big Local and the realities of delivery
- community wants and community needs
- long term development and short term delivery
- hyper-local focus and/or outward looking orientation
- accountability, risk and innovation
- freedoms and flexibilities contrasted with clear advice.

## 5.2 Balancing the Big Local vision with realities on the ground

In many ways the following discussion appears to echo the findings of previous research indicating that ‘most areas are failing to retain [a] *‘golden thread’ between their activities and their vision*’ ([R4C, 2016: 4](#)). It is this connection, or potential lack of connection, between the everyday realities and longer term goals of Big Local that this section explores further.

Resident-led change, as initially envisioned by Local Trust, was never meant to be a neat, linear, initiative. Areas develop, change – or struggle – but at their own pace. In this Big Local is in stark contrast with previous neighbourhood change and regeneration programmes in that areas are not driven by top down targets, annual spend and externally imposed goals and outcomes (see for example [New Deal for Communities](#) (Batty *et al* 2010) and the [Single Regeneration Budget](#) (Rhodes *et al* undated). Big Local is therefore *“Inside out”, rather than agencies or someone outside the community seeking to engage the community – ‘outside in’*<sup>5</sup>. This is where Big Local is qualitatively different to now historic Area Based Initiatives:

*‘.....didn’t want areas to be dependent on people that were doing things for them, because in other programmes you can fully resource that and then the programme finishes and everybody walks away, and I’ve had that feedback from people as well on other programmes – including New Deal where people were like ‘The money is here; it’s great’. The minute that stops everybody goes, all these workers disappear because their salaries aren’t being paid and then we’re just left and if it hasn’t increased our skills actually we’re not much better off.’* (Local Trust)

This ‘resident to resident’ focus is reflected in:

- **the pace of change** in Big Local areas: some have made rapid progress and, within the first two years of becoming operational, have achieved major changes in their local community – the development, for example, of the Play Park in Barrowcliff. Others, after a promising start

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<sup>5</sup> in unpublished notes from NCVO hosted workshop with Local Trust and partners for research, *A study of community engagement within the Big Local programme 2016*, NCVO

have become ‘bogged down’ in the minutiae of project management or the legal issues of incorporation.

- **scope and ambition** of the original Big Local plans: some had a large-scale, strategic, vision for their area already in place before Big Local– the transformation of Lawrence Weston being a case in point- or at least long held ambitions, e.g. the skatepark in Grassland Hasmoor. For others, that vision was perhaps less ambitious, but grounded in the views of local residents and in the spirit of ‘starting where people are at’, have adopted an approach of incremental change through a range of smaller scale projects. Indeed, those that have started small scale (such as Three Parishes, and Radstock) have valued the experience gained in their early years of this approach and have started to become more ambitious whereas others, particularly where there were highly ambitious plans for matched funding, have had to scale back their ambitions and activities.

What is evident, however, is that partnerships have at times struggled to translate their early visions into delivery on the ground, particularly where those plans were ambitious and partnerships were attempting to meet multiple and often competing goals. The criticism, therefore, that Big Local areas have a ‘disconnect’ between vision and activity is perhaps rather harsh. Even ‘many small activities’ and actions in the community can have a substantial impact on peoples’ lives – and deaths, as noted in the Bountagu example in Section 2.

Where Our Bigger Story has observed and recorded local plan reviews (see for example the detailed discussion on this in the series of [‘Partnerships in Conversation’](#) films or, specifically, [the plan review in Ramsey](#)) residents have been acutely aware of the need to assess activities against their longer term objectives. They are also concerned that the day to day pressures of programme management have diverted energies from those longer term strategic objectives. What is important however, as Big Locals evolve, is that that ‘golden-thread’ connecting strategy and activity is sustained and built upon.

### 5.3 Balancing community needs and community wants

The time allowed for, and resource allocated to, initial community profiling and plan development was appreciated by partnership members and noted as different to other funding regimes with time limited consultation and short time-scales for bid preparation. However, the process raised a number of questions in the transition between visioning and delivery:

- Are the views expressed by those consulted reflective of actual needs, or only of what people thought others needed?
- How do Big Local areas respond to the needs of those ‘quiet voices’ who could be ‘the least heard’ in the planning and delivery process
- Are Big Local areas responding to wants rather than needs? And to what extent are they addressing the underlying problems (identified in community profiles and the IVAR [foresighting report](#) – 2014) or addressing ‘surface’ issues:

*‘[I wanted Big Local] to address some deep problems here and not just cosmetic change.....to make real changes in [names Big Local] and not just be hanging baskets.’*

The needs versus wants issue is illustrated in the case of Radstock. In the consultation process, adults identified that children ‘needed’ more supervised play provision. What young people said they ‘wanted’ was safe spaces for unsupervised play.

The distinction is not always that clear cut. Partnerships may feel they need to respond to community wants – to be seen to be active and doing something in the short term (e.g. environmental improvements). For some, agonising over whether something was a want or an underlying need could be a distraction from actual delivery. For still others, a particular ‘want’ in the community had been one for so long that what was now ‘needed’ was a response. For example, both Barrowcliff and Grassland Hasmoor had been working for at least a decade to bring about a play park and skate park in their respective areas. What Big Local had enabled was a response to those long expressed requests.

Throughout the research, another tension that has emerged related to how Big Local areas should respond to cuts to local government services and the pressures, often from within the community, to ‘substitute’ for those services. This applied in particular to:

- the withdrawal of youth and play services in a number of areas
- the ending of community chest/local authority small grants schemes
- the threatened closure of community facilities (e.g. the library in Three Parishes) or transfer of community assets from the local authority to the private sector (Hanwell).

Questions were also raised as to whether small grants were effectively replacing previous local authority community chest schemes which had been withdrawn, rather than stimulating new activity or ‘protecting’ existing provision to the detriment of new initiatives:

*‘The risk is that grants are on a first come first served basis and the bigger organisations are better placed to apply.’ (Partnership member)*

Cuts were also seen as a factor in the time taken to deliver projects, particularly capital ones. Planning permissions (e.g. for environmental improvements, play spaces and even signage) have taken longer than anticipated because of reduced staffing to process applications and this could lead to frustrations within the community where people thought that *‘nothing was happening.’*

## 5.4 Balancing long term development and short term delivery

The fact that Big Local is ‘grounded’ in the community was seen as a key asset. Residents and, indeed, delivery agencies, were *‘in for the long haul’*. This in itself however, has surfaced some tensions.

The resident-led nature of Big Local was seen in some cases as contributing to a slower than anticipated pace of development. Residents are very conscious that they need to be seen (by other residents) to get things right and show tangible results:

*‘The challenge is that strategic work takes time and residents do not see change happening quickly and can get frustrated...so low level activity is as important as the strategic.’*  
(Partnership member)

*‘People accept results, not promises. They want to see a result, and if you do not*



*produce that result, they will go away.’ (Partnership member)*

A slow lead in time though does have the longer term potential benefit of building community ownership of plans and activities:

*‘It hasn’t got off to quite the start perhaps that they all hoped for, but partly because they were one of the [wave 1 areas] and it took a while nationally for them to be able to feed some of their aims and objectives down and for them to understand it. But also partly because there isn’t a lot of council involvement or structured involvement, they have had to devise those structures themselves.’ (Council Officer)*

In some areas, therefore, there has been an emphasis on ‘quick wins’ (putting in planters/other environmental improvements). However, even apparently ‘easy’ actions can take time. Green space improvements in one part of Northfleet, identified as a quick visual win, had to be abandoned because of problems with planning permissions. In Barrowcliff, the plan to have road safety measures near the school seemed to drag on:

*‘It took two and a half years – but we got there.’ (Partnership member)*

Other areas talk about the ‘trade off’ between getting things done versus the importance of embedding the resident-led ethos. Taking time to build local capacity may appear to slow delivery, but has long term gains in terms of commitment, sustainability, allowing for things to happen differently and not just involving ‘the usual suspects’ in decision making:

*‘We have needed to do a lot of capacity building with a lot of new people, and I suppose the downside is the time frame but the upside I suppose is that if we had gone through the usual channels of councils, through the usual suspects of councillors and people that councillors knew, we probably would be further forward, but we may not necessarily have, I do not know, delivered quite what people want.’ (Council Officer)*

## 5.5 Balancing the ‘hyper local’ with being outward looking

The relatively small populations, and therefore the hyper-local aspect of Big Local, was viewed as a key strength. Residents, particularly (but not exclusively) in rural areas, talked about being able to access services previously unavailable – or which required lengthy and expensive travel. For example, people in Ramsey have had to travel out of the area to access children’s activities, and were thus dependent on having a car or the funds to pay for expensive bus fares. Toddler Time, the BOSH play scheme and Crunch youth club appear to be making a huge difference to families ([Ramsey Fun Day](#)) who now not only have services on their doorstep but also volunteering opportunities. In the case of Birchfield, matching up those local needs with social business opportunities enabled Big Local to both respond to those local circumstances, but also support the development of an enterprise which is now winning contracts outside the immediate area.

The ‘downside’ of this hyper-localism was reported in some areas, where Big Locals become inward looking and do not see ‘the bigger picture’. For some, such as Revoe, the immediacy of the problems facing the community has made looking outwards to what else is happening in Blackpool challenging. Others, particularly in rural areas, felt isolated from the bigger picture of decisions made at a County

Council level. Areas such as Lawrence Weston have been very astute at aligning themselves with other strategic regeneration plans – but they have been fortunate enough to be located in an area where there are (in contrast to other Big Locals) opportunities to do so and to access external funding (e.g. Coastal Communities Fund).

This is where Big Local as a wider network of 150 areas plays an important role in ‘seeing the bigger picture’. For those that had engaged in training sessions and networking events, Local Trust played an important role in enabling residents see that bigger picture:

*‘Because when you’re just..... in one place, unless you travel to other places and go to the venues, it’s very much, it’s difficult to keep the enthusiasm going and I think having your sort of parental oversight in this respect has been good. It feels that I am plugged into something which is bigger than just [names Big Local area]. ....And it shows that we are in a sense part of a bigger community ourselves.’ (Partnership member)*

*The spring events were very inspiring. You realise that Big Local is a significant campaign across the country.’ (Partnership member)*

## 5.6 Balancing accountability, risk and innovation

*‘.....people should take risks probably because funders think that’s a good thing to say, so ‘Be innovative, be different, take a risk; it’s okay, we can learn from failure’ but actually in those communities I don’t think these partnerships feel like that at all because they feel accountable to the other people in the community and they see failure as a personal failure or losing the money or wasting the money. So I actually think every partnership is more risk averse for valid reasons than we would say is necessary. ...So I think a lot of it is about the fear of criticism.’ (Local Trust)*

As discussed in Section 3, local residents on partnerships are acutely aware of their accountability to the wider community for Big Local money. One of the consequences of this has been to operate in quite a formal way – to be seen to be accountable – and this can be off putting to local residents and make it difficult to recruit new people. This is not, however, simply about formality, but also – as noted - the complexity of decisions partnerships are making – not only about spend but also, for example, about planning permissions, legal structures or commissioning services.

Some, however, have been more innovative – with all meetings being open to the public with community members (rather than just the formally elected partnership members) having a right to vote. Others publish their meetings and financial statements online or have not adopted formal/specific officer positions and rotate roles. These are the exception rather than the norm and even where Big Local areas felt that their partnerships had adopted more collective approaches to decision making and were highly democratic, they also noted a ‘downside’ to being open and accessible. Decision making could be a slow process – with original decisions being revisited and reviewed on a regular basis – or opportunities which had short response deadlines being lost (e.g. possible purchase of a community asset in Birchfield).

That transition from development to delivery has in a number of instances, been slower than anticipated and the importance of transparency and accountability can result in cautious spend patterns (see also [IVAR 2015](#)):

*‘... they had heard comments and some negative comments about how some of the [previous regeneration programmes] money was spent ... and I think that was partly what caused panic with them, because they didn’t want to repeat what they perceived to be those mistakes.’*  
(Partnership member)

Cautious spend was particularly a characteristic of some of the Big Local areas that were, in a sense, created, rather than ‘natural’ communities such as the rural villages, or disparate urban estates, brought together to submit a Big Local plan. Here, substantial amounts of time had been spent on developing due process to ensure the equity of spend and transparency of decision making, which had delayed delivery but had also been a strategy for managing the risk of potential conflict between communities.

There are, however, other forms of risk. Barrowcliff ‘took a risk’ by investing 40% of its Big Local money in the development of the Play Park – despite some scepticism locally that this would just get vandalised. The counter risk was, however, that residents had been arguing for this facility for at least ten years and there was therefore a reputational risk if the partnership did not deliver.

There are also elements of risk in terms of the issues a Big Local is prepared to take on – particularly where they are trying to address some of the ‘hard’ underlying issues that are confronting the community. People become passionate about the issue – and ‘their’ solution and there have been instances where partnership members have been verbally abused for their stance (or that of the partnership) on a particular issue. Communities can agree on what those issues are, but still be divided on the solutions as in the Blackpool Revue (Snapshot 1).

Perhaps the most substantial risk some areas are taking is in asset management. Taking on the community hub because this is what the community wants – but without a clear idea of whether it is sustainable beyond the life of Big Local funding – can be, in the long term, a liability more than it is an asset. The Hanwell (Snapshot 8) illustrates a rather different approach to managing assets and spreading risk.

## 5.7 Balancing freedoms and flexibilities contrasted with clear guidance

Participants in the evaluation, both residents and workers, have identified the core strengths of Big Local as being its resident-led ethos and the associated flexibilities afforded in Local Trust guidance: the absence of prescribed work programmes or approaches to delivery, the long-term time frame, and the lack of numerical targets or annual spend patterns. Those that had experience of older funding regimes noted:

*‘The lovely thing about it is..... that is actually about community development. It’s not about ticking boxes, it’s not about providing stats to politicians to back up claims they’ve made. It’s genuinely about local people having the ability to make differences and nobody’s counting it. Nobody is going, ‘Yeah, you’ve got to get these stats in by such and such a date.’*  
(Partnership member)

*‘The old RDA [Regional Development Agency] mechanism and the SRB [Single Regeneration Budget] mechanisms were very prescriptive and very complicated and they tended to wind people up and constrain them.’* (Council Officer)

*‘Because they never trusted local people to make their own decisions and I think that’s the key thing with it to me..... And that is absolutely brilliant. And I’ve seen projects that are spending a lot more money achieving a lot less.’* (Council Officer)

Those flexibilities, however, are not always welcomed. Some participants would like clear advice, more boundaries, and a straighter path to follow:

*'You see, whenever we spoke to Local Trust...they've always said it's an evolving process. And, you know, they leave us dangling – do we do this? If we do this, are we going to have our backside kicked? So you phone them back and you say 'Well, we're doing this'. 'Well that's fine if that's what you want to do'. So there is no clear cut avenue for us to pursue.'*

(Partnership member)

From a different perspective, however, the above quotation illustrates the tensions that Local Trust (and indeed reps) have to balance: offering advice and guidance whilst remaining light-touch and resisting 'top-down' directives. This may become a more acute issue as Big Local areas have to move to decisions on 'spend down' (tapering their funding as the money reduces) or 'spend out' (using up all their money). As the money runs out – who takes ultimate responsibility for the hard decisions either for allocating diminishing funds or ending spend altogether?

The following concluding section of the report begins by exploring the demands the programme makes on active residents.

## Section 6

### Conclusions: Thinking Back and Looking Forward

#### Overview

The following section offers a brief overview of:

- learning to date from the Our Bigger Story evaluation
- the future for Big Local areas.

#### 6.1 Learning

**Thinking back** over 2015/16, all of the 15 areas involved in Our Bigger Story are now delivering against their original plan or, in the case of Three Parishes and Ramsey for example, have reached the stage of refreshing their original plans. How each area is working towards the four Big Local outcomes differs. There are those that have:

- taken a community development approach to building the capacity of grass roots groups, developed volunteering self- help initiatives and social enterprise development (e.g. Birchfield and Bountagu)
- encouraged greater collaboration and partnership working between local groups and organisations (e.g. Ramsey and Whitley Bay)
- focused on delivering substantial capital projects (e.g. Barrowcliff) or have plans to do so (e.g. Grassland Hasmoor).

Delivery mechanisms also vary: from small grants (Radstock) through to open tendering (Revoe) and service level agreements (Hanwell). Further, their ambitions vary from large scale physical change in Lawrence Weston to more small scale, incremental steps in Three Parishes.

As noted, the 15 areas are all very different, not only in approach, but in the scale of the challenges they face: from Revoe (amongst the ten most deprived wards in the country) through to those where poverty is a feature (and sometimes hidden) amidst relative affluence.

In some cases, there is evidence that Big Local has been a catalyst for change. This applies to physical and environmental improvements (Barrowcliff). In others it is around stimulating new activities or building a stronger sense of community (Bountagu and Hanwell). In some areas, progress has been slower and partnerships have struggled to turn their original vision into delivery on the ground: *'...we need to be patient as the wheels of positive change are slow moving. Things don't change overnight.'* (Partnership member)

The flip side of acting as a change agent has been, in the face of continuing austerity measures, attempts by Big Local partnerships to protect services and community assets which are under threat – in particular, community buildings, play and youth services.

Again, as anticipated, progress has not been linear. Periods of intense activity in some areas have then been followed by a slower pace of change – and vice versa. Despite this, partners repeatedly talk of the Big Local, and the Big Local approach, becoming more embedded in the community:

*'Big Local is paving the way for change because it is resident owned and residents are making the choices about change. It is not just agencies parachuting in.'* (Local Trust)

In terms of resident-led change and the 'light touch' approach, this is not a new message. However, Big Local is qualitatively different to previous community led change initiatives. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Neighbourhoods Programme was four years. Whilst New Deal for Communities (NDC) ran for 10 years, with the original intention of being resident led, the [final programme evaluation](#)<sup>6</sup> explicitly comments on low levels of community engagement with NDC Partnerships and the extent to which the initiative became agency-led.

## 6.2 The future

As a programme lasting at least ten years, Big Local begs three big questions:

- How much time is sufficient to demonstrate positive outcomes and impact?
- How is/can residents' commitment be sustained and refreshed over a decade, particularly in those areas where there are, or have been, tensions and conflicts?
- How big an 'ask' is Big Local of individual residents and local communities?

The first two questions will inform the focus of future evaluation. We begin to address the third question below.

### A big ask?

*'A million pounds over 10 years is canny but it takes an awful lot of energy from an awful lot of people to do that.'* (Partnership member)

As noted throughout the report, the principle of resident-led change was particularly valued. However, perhaps the biggest challenge for the Big Local approach is that it is a 'big ask' of local residents:

*'I don't think that they realised the responsibility they were placing on individuals and people in these deprived areas. People don't just struggle with maths and English. They struggle with personal relations, there's mental health issues, broken families, the normal drug and alcohol issues...the transience is ridiculous. The state of the housing.....'* (Partnership member)

This quote, from and about Revoe, is true of Blackpool and may be an example from one extreme in the spectrum of Big Local areas, but it does reflect a wider issue.

The 2016 Local Trust Partnership Review may have found that partners did not find their role 'burdensome', but the shared narrative (across all 15 areas involved in Our Bigger Story) has been that they found their role onerous. This applies in terms of time commitments, particularly where partnership members have been drawn in to operational management, conflict mediation and monitoring, as well as fulfilling strategic roles.

The 'big ask' is more complex than simply time demands. The learning necessary to manage a one million community-based programme can be very demanding and technical, e.g. finding out about planning permissions, tendering processes, asset transfer and Pre-Qualifying Questionnaires to take on the management of local services. And it also raises questions around whether Local Trust's

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<sup>6</sup> Communities and Local Government (2010) *The New Deal for Communities Experience: A final assessment The New Deal for Communities Evaluation: Final report – Volume 7*. London, Communities and Local Government

aspirations that Big Local partnerships will broaden activism in their areas and share decision making powers beyond their formal and informal structures, are too big an 'ask' of residents. What has emerged over time is that, whereas the programme has encouraged residents to take risks, try new approaches and spread active involvement across the whole Big local area, partnerships have on the whole tended to 'play it safe'. This applies both to governance, where traditional structures have by and large been put in place, and delivery – with tried and tested interventions being adopted. Given that the Big Local approach is new to many people, and given the responsibility that partnership members feel for being accountable and being seen to be accountable for the money, this has been perhaps, inevitable.

Furthermore, the scale of expectations and responsibilities also plays out at an emotional level. Whilst there is a history of tensions and conflicts in earlier area-based initiatives, this has often been between residents and paid officials. As a resident-led initiative, tensions and conflict in Big Local areas can be qualitatively different. Conflict is not between local people and some remote authority, but, potentially, between near neighbours. How are these tensions and conflicts managed and resolved, without individuals either leaving the partnership or, indeed, the local area?

*'There have been power struggles between some residents.... There is a lot of passion and excitement. But in meetings when things are delayed or not going to plan that can spill over into anger and frustration.'* (Community Worker)

Residents take their responsibilities very seriously and this creates a pressure to 'deliver' which can weigh heavily on partnership members. Residents active on partnerships talked repeatedly of this being a steep 'learning curve', particularly in the transition from plan development to delivery.

Finally, a recurrent theme in interviews was that the Big Local approach required a change in the mind-set of those active on partnerships, in grass roots groups and the wider community:

*'Big Local is asset-based community development – building local capacity to respond to local needs, but it's a big step. The view is that others should sort this out rather than doing it ourselves.'*

*'Overcoming dependency and a paternalistic society that we are still in in [names Big Local area]...How to get people responsible for their own community and not about what they are doing but what we are doing. Getting beyond the 'great they' that are to blame for things [e.g. the Council].'* Partnership members)

Being involved in Big Local partnerships is demanding and, as noted, requires residents to manage, or 'balance', often completing agendas and demands. So what is it that keeps them going?

Positive experiences have been repeatedly mentioned in terms of building personal confidence, developing new skills and knowledge or simply the social aspects of partnerships. In some instances, local residents have moved into being employed by Big Local.

*'Before [Big Local] nobody even knew my name. Now people stop in the street and talk to me....and smile.'*

*'People used to dismiss what I said. Big Local does not do that. It makes you feel valued and not just dismissed as....silly....with nothing to say. That's made a big difference for me.'* (Partnership members)

Linked to the 'big ask' is the issue of legacy. As Big Locals have evolved, the issues of sustainability and legacy have moved up the agenda:



*‘Having the next three year plan approved...focuses the mind on what we would like to end up with after the Big Local project.’ (Partnership member)*

There are those for whom legacy is about cultural change or building the skills and confidence of residents to take action, with some looking to their LTOs continuing as the local strategic body which can support resident action. Others such as Lawrence Weston are looking at neighbourhood planning as a way forward, managing assets and leaving behind a sustainable organisation. Others are discussing incorporation of the partnership as a legal entity as a means of securing and managing future resources, something not necessarily envisaged in the Big Local approach.

**Looking forward**, legacy will become an increasingly important issue over the coming three years as some areas move towards having used all their Big Local money. How the process is managed is likely to bring an added layer of complexity to decision making processes in Big Local areas: what to stop funding or what to prioritise in areas where there are increasing, and competing, needs with ever fewer resources. As Local Trust reflected in an evaluation discussion:

*‘So that’s what we’ve got to prepare for, because there will be – the end is in sight, there’ll be nothing else after this piece of funding has finished and there’ll be – they won’t have achieved everything that they wanted to achieve with their money and there’ll still be ....a shedload of problems in those areas which obviously have not been addressed or recovered and there’ll be some of those big aspirations that they’d had at the beginning like dealing with poverty, transforming the local economy that basically haven’t happened. And so they’ll be not very happy.’ (Local Trust)*

As discussed in Section 4, this raises the question of what it is reasonable to expect areas to achieve with £1 million over a decade.

In thinking about the future, areas have reached a point of what could be described as a fragile maturity. Fragile in the sense that partnerships in the delivery phase are reliant on a few people – and in some cases, reliant on a handful of already overstretched activists. Maturity in the sense that partnerships are more confident in taking difficult decisions. The danger of that growing maturity (and a danger that partnerships are aware of) is that the partnership becomes seen as a clique which, un-intentionally, has the effect of excluding new members.

Perhaps the most significant emerging question at this point in time is, ‘what, fundamentally, is Big Local?’ For some it is about structures and governance – with partnerships becoming incorporated bodies with a view to sustainability. There are those for whom Big Local is just another funding stream that will come to an end and the challenge is to maximise opportunities now, while that money is available. Alternatively, partners talk about Big Local as a potential catalyst for broader community change - an initiative which is actually about fostering a culture in which local people feel (whatever structures are, or are not, left behind, whatever funding is, or is not, available) they have a greater influence and control over their lives and whereby their community is, indeed, an even better place to live. This aspiration raises a wider, important question for the future: does Big Local have the appetite and scope to become a wider movement – over and above the work in individual areas?

This, in turn, is a challenge for the future evaluation activity of Our Bigger Story. What has been built up over the last two years is a greater understanding of how Big Local partnerships are operating and how they are implementing the aspirations of resident led change. Further, there is a growing body of evidence of the changes partnerships and delivery partners are effecting for individuals within their communities. The challenge for the evaluation will be to unpick the wider ripple effects of Big Local, as an ethos and way of working on the wider community, on those people who are neither

active on partnerships nor accessing directly those services supported by Big Local funding, and on the wider array of institutions influencing a community such as public bodies and private sector interests.

## Appendix: Research aims and methods

### Summary of research activity

The report works with the [theory of change](#) developed for Big Local (2013) in that it aims to capture:

- the diversity of the initiative in terms of structures, processes, local contexts and goals. More detail on that diversity is presented in Appendix 1 which offers brief pen portraits of the 15 Big Local partnerships involved in Our Bigger Story,
- the factors which enable and/or potentially hinder progress against outcomes and long term goals,
- the flexible, non-linear nature of the programme. Change takes place within resident-led timescales, encourages risk taking and is not ‘measured’ against specific annual targets or spend patterns,
- Big Local as a learning system: what works in resident-led regeneration and, crucially, why does it work?

The findings in this report are based on:

**Table 8: Our Bigger Story: Summary of evaluation activity 2015-16**

| Evaluation Activity Year 1 (2015)   | Evaluation Activity Year 2 (2016)   |
|---|---|
| Review of existing Big Local data – including community profiles and plans as well as materials (such as film, podcasts and photographs) available in other media   | Ongoing reviews of Big Local data (e.g. Plan Reviews.   |
| 102 individual interviews with key stakeholders - including resident partnership members, workers, delivery partners, Locally Trusted Organisations, volunteers and ‘beneficiaries’ (as described by a number of partnerships), | 55 individual interviews and conversations, with partners, delivery partners, recipients of small grants and local people accessing Big Local supported projects, and Local Trust                         |
| 85 filmed interviews/observations in 10 Big Local areas   | 62 filmed interviews / observations at Big Local events and meetings  |
| Observation sessions at partnership meetings/plan reviews and Big Local events, ten focus groups involving 54 resident partnership members, delivery partners and beneficiaries.  | 15 facilitated thematic discussions (i.e. all 15 Big Local case study sites), involving 157 participants<br>13 observation sessions at partnership meetings/plan reviews and Big Local events             |
|   | Four networking workshops in <a href="#">Ramsey</a> , <a href="#">Leeds</a> , <a href="#">Birmingham</a> and <a href="#">Hanwell</a> to explore emerging Big Local themes and outcomes involving 14 areas |
|   | Focus Groups with Big Local reps (two) and Local Trust staff  |
|   | Resident partner diaries in seven areas   |

Our Bigger Story has also built a website which brings together:

- Materials (in different media) produced by Big Local areas themselves ([www.ourbiggerstory.com](http://www.ourbiggerstory.com)). There are currently 238 of posts across areas on the website. (A 'post' may be a single item such as a film or podcast, or multiple materials (e.g. up to 12 photographs per event.)
- 34 films, available on a dedicated [vimeo channel](#) produced by the evaluation team in local areas
- Seven summative films addressing the issues raised in this report.
- 

This site, therefore, allows for the tracking of change in Big Local areas over the life of the programme and can be searched either by media format (e.g. film/audio etc.) or against a time-line of when things happened.

## Research aims

This report maps progress in, and additional learning from, the evaluation sample of 15 Big Local areas 2015 to 2016. It takes the story of Big Local forwards from the [Early Years](#) research undertaken by NCVO during 2014 (NCVO, 2015) and builds on other subsequent evaluation reports such as [Community Engagement in Big Local](#) (NCVO 2016) and [People places and health agencies](#), (Institute for Voluntary Action Research report 2016).

This report aims to explore:

- the **five overarching elements of evaluation** identified by Local Trust: namely, the approach, delivery, outcomes, impact and influence of Big Local
- the **principles which underpin** Big Local as a resident-led, asset-based approach to neighbourhood development and regeneration
- the **specific tasks outlined for Our Bigger Story** within the integrated evaluation framework developed by Local Trust (March 2015) in terms of understanding Big Local processes and outcomes.

These are summarised in Table 9, below.

**Table 9: Our Bigger Story: Core Evaluation focus**

| EVALUATION - PROCESS FOCUS                         | EVALUATION - OUTCOME FOCUS  |
|--|---|
| Resident-led ( <i>approach</i> )                   | Residents better able to identify and prioritise needs ( <i>outcomes</i> )        |
| Asset-based ( <i>approach</i> )                    | Residents better able to respond to needs ( <i>outcomes</i> )                     |
| Taking place at community pace ( <i>approach</i> ) | People have increased skills and confidence ( <i>outcomes</i> )                   |
| Opportunities for reflection ( <i>approach</i> )   | Residents improve Big Local areas in ways that matter to them ( <i>outcomes</i> ) |

| Taking risks ( <i>approach</i> )  | A better place to live ( <i>outcomes</i> )                                      |
|---|---|
| Local Trust makes funding available in ways that are accessible and user friendly ( <i>delivery</i> ) | Infrastructure supports resident decision making ( <i>impact</i> )              |
|   | Lasting and sustainable change in communities ( <i>impact</i> )                 |
|   | Government policy facilitates resident-led decision making ( <i>influence</i> ) |

In addition, in 2016, the evaluation team introduced five key research themes to ‘unpack’ learning around process and outcomes, as agreed with Local Trust. These related to Big Local areas capacity to *negotiate change*, the extent to which they are a *catalyst for change* in their areas, the development of *community leadership and influence*, their experience in dealing with *expectations* around ‘achievement,’ and understanding about *sustainability and legacy*. These are explained further in Section 4 of the current report.

## Research methods

Big Local aims to bring about positive change in communities. The aim of Our Bigger Story, as a longitudinal multi-media evaluation, is to record that change, as well as the learning involved, in multiple ways in 15 Big Local areas over time. Considerable attention was given during 2015, the first year of the evaluation, to building the architecture to support what is an ambitious, complex, and long-term study. This has involved:

- Selection and recruitment of a sample of 15 Big Local areas to participate in the research
- Web-site and data-base development
- Multi-media training and support for participating Big Local areas.

## Selecting and recruiting evaluation sites

The evaluation is being undertaken in and with 15 Big Local areas, representing 10% of all the communities covered by the Big Local programme. These were selected through a short baseline survey of all 150 Big Local areas carried out between February and May 2015. The survey was designed to assess interest in involvement in Our Bigger Story and to identify the range of social media technologies currently being used by areas. It was accompanied by taster workshops at the 2015 Big Local spring events, attracting 51 participants.

In total 35 Big Local areas expressed an interest in participating in the evaluation. These were assessed against criteria agreed with Local Trust which were designed to ensure a balanced sample covering, for example, all regions in England, a mix in terms of urban/rural/coastal areas and differing population sizes. The final group of 15 selected evaluation sites includes:

- Big Local areas in all regions in England
- nine urban Big Local areas, three rural and three coastal
- five ‘wave 1’ Big Local areas, six from ‘wave 2’ and four from ‘wave 3’
- Big Local areas with populations ranging from around 2,400 residents to around 11,500 and an average of 6,500.

Inception meetings were held with each of the 15 selected Big Local areas, in order to ensure that each had taken a strategic, collective and informed decision to participate. Big Local areas asked questions around confidentiality, time expectations and the availability of support from the evaluation team, ownership and archiving of evaluation materials. Residents were particularly concerned about the film making aspect of Our Bigger Story as the period of negotiating access to areas coincided with the airing of Benefit's Street on television and substantial time has been dedicated to :

- building trust with partnerships and residents in terms of the content of any public facing multi-media material
- delivering multi-media training and offering grants of up to £500 to purchase equipment as a way of encouraging areas to develop their own materials. Media training events were held in September 2015 in Birmingham, London and York, involving 69 participants in total, to give Big Local areas hands-on experience of film machining, creating digital stories and podcasts as well as being introduced to creative visual/written methods of evaluation. All 15 evaluation areas attended with representatives from an additional five areas that had also expressed initial interest through the baseline survey. All also received the equipment grant (up to £500) for the amount requested by early 2016.

### **Web-site and data-base development**

Our Bigger Story has started to construct an integrated public facing website which will document multi-media evaluation materials from all 15 Big Local areas over the life of the programme (see [www.ourbiggerstory.com](http://www.ourbiggerstory.com)). This is searchable by a time-line, by the media used and against Big Local outcomes. It enables the evaluation team and individual Big Local areas to up-load materials (video, audio, photographs and reports) that are for wider circulation and do not include information that could be deemed to be confidential. There are currently 238 'posts'<sup>7</sup> from the 15 Big Local areas on the website alongside a vimeo channel ([The Residents Stories](#)) with 34 films made by OBS over 2015-16.

There have been a number of teething problems with the website. For Big Local areas with slow broadband speeds, uploading films can be extremely time consuming. Internally, the practice of uploading materials has identified a number of layout problems – in particular the matching of text with photographs of different sizing. Both these issues are being addressed by Creative Media through advice to the areas and web-redesign.

Behind the public facing website, systems for secure online data storage and management have been developed as part of building the foundations for the longitudinal study. Given the volume (and file size) of visual materials additional secure storage has been purchased from the University. This has the capacity to preserve a decade's worth of written, audio and visual data.

### **Evaluation activities year one (2015)**

Evaluation activity over year one consisted of:

- a review of existing data from the selected Big Local evaluation areas, including community profiles and plans as well as materials available in other media (such as existing films, podcasts and photographs),

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<sup>7</sup> A 'post' may be a single item – e.g. a film – or multiple items – e.g. up to 12 photographs per event.

- individual semi-structured interviews with 102 key stakeholders involved in the Big Local areas - including resident partnership members, workers, delivery partners, Locally Trusted Organisations, volunteers, local businesses and beneficiaries,
- 85 filmed interviews/observations in ten Big Local areas.
- observations of six meetings and events, such as partnership meetings, plan reviews and wider stakeholder and community events. Filming and observation sessions have not been 'double counted' in the description of research activity,
- ten focus groups involving 54 resident partnership members, delivery partners and beneficiaries, and
- pilot social media analysis in three Big Local areas.

The focus in year one was on gaining a baseline understanding of each of the 15 areas: their histories, the patterns of (and learning from) development behind Big Local and what they hoped to achieve. The methods adopted relied largely on more traditional evaluation methods (e.g. taped/transcribed individual and focus group interviews) supplemented by film making and other multi-media activity (e.g. podcasts). This data informed the [Interim Summary Report](#) (with a more detailed paper submitted to Local Trust) published in April 2016.

### **Evaluation activities year two (2016)**

Year one involved substantial learning for the team around the integration of multi-media methods into a longitudinal evaluation. In discussion with Local Trust and the 15 areas involved, a slightly different approach was adopted in 2016 in that Our Bigger Story:

- made more use of film as a means of recording both individual interviews and group activities/meetings. There are now a series of ['In Conversation'](#) films on the OBS website.
- integrated film into the evaluation process as a way of stimulating discussions between the Big Local areas involved.

In addition, the focus for data gathering (post base-line) changed. In addition to gathering information on area's progress against outcomes a more thematic approach was adopted to capture data around the themes of leadership, influence, expectations, legacy and Big Local as a change mechanism.

Research activity has, therefore, focused more on 'whole partnership' facilitated workshops (with fewer individual interviews with partners and residents), recording activities supported by Big Local areas (e.g. [the use of small grants](#)) and the use of 'cross partnership' events to both stimulate discussion and gather data. Over the year this involved:

- audio or video recording partnership meetings in all 15 areas
- whole partnership thematic workshops in each area attended by 163 people, predominantly local residents
- cross partnership events were attended by 48 members of local partnerships. Each session lasted up to three hours (using films from each Big Local area to stimulate discussion). Edited films of these sessions in [Ramsey](#), [Leeds](#), [Birchfield](#) and [Hanwell](#) have been made and are available on the OBS website



- observations at 13 partnership meetings
- two workshops with Big Local reps attended by 35 people. The first of these reflected on the wider applicability of the findings from the Interim report whilst the second, specifically, focused on aspects of risk and risk management in Big Local areas.
- One focus group with Local Trust staff to reflect on the emerging findings from thematic analysis
- One interview with Debbie Ladds, prior to her leaving her post as Local Trust chief executive
- 62 interviews in the areas with partnership members, delivery partners, recipients of small grants and local residents accessing services supported or delivered by Big Locals.

In addition, residents in seven areas kept reflective diaries on their experience of being Big Local partners. An edited film version of these diaries is available as [‘Diary Lines’](#).

## About the Third Sector Research Centre

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Big Local is managed by Local Trust and funded by the Big Lottery Fund.



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The support of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Office for Civil Society (OCS) and the Barrow Cadbury UK Trust is gratefully acknowledged. The work was part of the programme of the joint ESRC and Barrow Cadbury Third Sector Research Centre.

